

Pakistan bars pilgrims from visiting Delhi

ISLAMABAD, July 9: Pakistan has cancelled the visit of pilgrims to the shrine of Hazrat Khwaja Nizamuddin later this month in view of the prevailing tension over the Kargil crises, reports PTI. The Religious Affairs Ministry said in a press release that because of the prevailing tension created by India it would not be possible for the Pakistani pilgrims to visit the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin in Delhi for the annual 'Urs' to be held from July 26 to August 2. Every year large number of Pakistani pilgrims visit the Muslim pilgrimage sites in India including the shrines of Hazrat Nizamuddin and Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti. Indian pilgrims also, mostly Sikhs, visit Sikh holy places in Pakistan including Nankana Sahib, Dera Sahib and Panja Sahib every year. The decision to stop the visit of pilgrims is surprising in view of the fact that the communications between the two countries including the weekly train service, air services and also the recently launched New Delhi-Lahore bus service is still running normally.

'US-Japan ties pose no threat to China'

BEIJING, July 9: Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi said today that Japan's strengthened military ties with the United States posed no threat to China and assured Beijing that Tokyo would not become a military superpower, reports Reuters. Obuchi told Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji new guidelines for US-Japan defence cooperation completed in May did not target specific countries or regions, Japan's Foreign Ministry said in statement said. "The Japan-US security arrangements are solely for our self-defence and do not target any countries or regions," Obuchi told Zhu, he said. "There is no change in our policy that Japan will never become a military power," Obuchi was quoted as saying during a three-day visit to Beijing. The statement said Zhu expressed concern over Japan's expanded military role in Asia and urged Tokyo to exclude Taiwan from the scope of the Japan-US defence guidelines. "We want you to prove what you have said by action in future," Zhu was quoted as telling Obuchi. China fears the military arrangements are designed to protect Taiwan - which it views as a renegade province which must be reunited with the mainland - in the event of Chinese military action against the island. Beijing says it would take military action in the event of a declaration of independence from Taiwan, which says China must become a democracy before reunification is possible. Obuchi said Japan would not support Taiwan's independence and it would not interfere in the issue.

10 including 2 soldiers killed in Philippines

ZAMBOANGA, July 9: Unidentified gunmen killed eight people celebrating a local festival and two army soldiers guarding a school in separate attacks in the southern Philippines, the military said Friday, reports AP. The military said suspected Muslim separatist rebels attacked a crowd celebrating the local "Kunduli" festival in Sultan sa Barongis town in Maguindanao province late Thursday. Regional military spokesman Col Fedesvino Covarrubias said the guerrillas allegedly fired automatic rifles at the merry-makers in the village of Bañal "shooting anyone on site."

There was no immediate reaction from the rebels, who are engaged in peace talks with the government. In another attack on the same day, two unidentified men allegedly sneaked up behind two soldiers guarding the Tumahubong National High School in Sumisip town in Basilan province and shot them. The killers fled with the soldiers' assault rifles and ammunition packs toward a remote village.

Weekly editor arrested in Karachi

KARACHI, July 9: The editor and a staffer of a Pakistani weekly magazine have been arrested in Karachi for publishing material likely to incite sectarian feuding, police said Friday, reports AFP. Police ransacked the office of the Pakistan News, published in Urdu and Sindhi, on Thursday and arrested its editor, Naveed Shad Arain, and a computer operator, the magazine's employees said. "We have arrested them for publishing a provocative article having serious sectarian implications which might ignite law and order problems in Karachi and other parts of the province," city police chief Farooq Amin Qureshi said. The magazine, which has a limited circulation, had printed an article on the personal life of the chief of the Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan (TJP), a political party representing the minority Shiite Muslim community.

Fierce fighting leaves 164 dead in Kashmir

MUSHKOH VALLEY, July 9: Fierce fighting erupted in Kashmir's Mushkoh Valley and Indian soldiers gunned down at least 50 intruders whom Pakistan's prime minister has tried to persuade to pull out of the area, field commanders said Friday, reports AP. Two days of fighting in the fertile valley, some six kilometers from Pakistan's border has left at least 120 intruders and 44 Indian soldiers dead - the highest casualty in a single operation since the fighting began early May. Soldiers also seized two peaks in the Batalik sector, some 100 kilometres northeast of Mushkoh Valley, said a senior field commander who cannot be identified. Gains made by Indian soldiers have been decisive, the Indian Express newspaper on Friday quoted army chief Gen V P Malik as saying in an interview after a two-day visit to the battlefield with air force chief A Y Tiplin. India says it has pushed back intruders several kilometers toward the ceasefire line in all four sectors. Soldiers have seized most of the mountains from the intruders in the Dras sector, but are facing heavy resistance in the Kaksar region. "Their defences in the Batalik area are crumbling," Gen Malik said. "Their casualties are very high and we see bodies lying all over." Gains made by

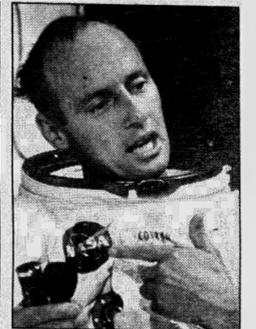
Indian troops in Batalik and Dras sectors are considerable and "we are increasing pressure on them in the remaining regions" of Mushkoh Valley and Kaksar, he said. Thursday midnight, the intruders launched a counter attack to seize Point 4875 in Mushkoh Valley but Indian soldiers held on to the peak that gives them a view of supply routes from Pakistan. Intruders fleeing from the captured Tiger Hill - soldiers captured it Sunday - had concentrated near Point 4875, resulting in heavy casualties, commanders said. Tiger Hill, a few kilometers (miles) east of Mushkoh Valley, overlooks the only highway

connecting state capital Srinagar with the northeastern town of Leh, 450 kilometers (250 miles). Air force jets pounded some of the positions of the intruders in the Dras sector Friday morning, an air force spokesman said in New Delhi. He said the air strikes were successful, but gave no details. Pakistani air force jets twice scrambled to engage Indian aircraft that intruded into its territory in the Mushkoh sector Thursday night and Friday morning, an army statement said in Islamabad. In New Delhi, an air force spokesman said the Pakistani allegations were baseless and that all operations were carried

out within its territory in the last two months. Far away, in the Batalik mountains, after overnight fighting, soldiers captured Kuakertan Ridge, one of the four ridges in the area, commanders said. One ridge still remains in control of the intruders. Indian soldiers suffered setbacks in the neighbouring Kaksar region, to the southeast. Fighting has raged for days over the Bajrang Post, one of the barren mountains where resistance has been fierce. At least two dozen Indian soldiers have been killed in the Kaksar region in recent weeks. India says Pakistani troops are leading the fighters in

Kashmir, a region divided between the two countries and claimed in its entirety by both. Islamabad, however, denies that, saying the fighters are Kashmiri insurgents that receive only moral support from Pakistan. Thursday, Indian army commanders showed The Associated Press three sacks of letters, maps of Indian army field guns and identification cards of Pakistan's northern light infantry regiment that troops recovered from the mountains. Despite Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's promise to persuade fighters to withdraw, Indian commanders on the Himalayan front said there was no sign of a retreat.

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US astronaut Conrad dies

LOS ANGELES, July 9: Astronaut Charles "Pete" Conrad, the third man to walk on the moon, was killed in a motorcycle accident in California, television networks reported Friday. He was 69, reports AFP. Conrad, a veteran of four US space flights, died from internal injuries in hospital after his motorcycle ran off the road. He was riding with friends near Ojai, north of Los Angeles, where he lived. Conrad, a Princeton University graduate and son of a World War I balloonist, was a Navy test pilot before he joined the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1962, a few years after the space program began. The Philadelphia native joined NASA's second team of nine astronauts and trained for the Gemini 5 mission which set an eight-day endurance record in August 1965, proving that man could remain in space long enough for a return flight to the moon. Conrad flew the Gemini-11 mission the following year, which docked with another craft and established a new altitude record of 1,368 kilometers (855 miles), while fellow astronaut Richard Gordon went on a brief spacewalk. His most spectacular moment in space came in November 1969, when he manned the second voyage to the moon aboard the Apollo 12 craft, and became the third human to set foot on lunar soil. In 1973, Conrad flew the first Skylab mission and established a new endurance record in space. A year before that mission he parachuted to safety from his military test plane moments before it crashed during a storm near Houston, Texas.

Prodi names EU panel

BRUSSELS, July 9: Incoming European Commission president Romano Prodi on Friday named a new 19-member team of commissioners, appointing former British Labour leader Neil Kinnock and Loyola de Palacio as his deputies, the Commission said, reports AFP. Kinnock will be in charge of administrative reforms at the Commission, the executive of the European Union (EU), while de Palacio will be in charge of relations with the European parliament, transport and energy, they said. Among the other major portfolios, Pascal Lamy of France will be in charge of international trade; Pedro Solbes will be in charge of economic and monetary affairs and Guenter Verheugen, a German, will take care of enlargement of the EU.

India to put two sats into orbit

NEW DELHI, July 9: India will put two advanced communications satellites into orbit in a year's time, officials from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said Friday, reports AFP. "Preparations are on to launch the INSAT-3B communications satellite on a European Ariane rocket from French Guiana in September this year," said a scientist at ISRO headquarters in the southern city of Bangalore. He added that the government had also cleared ISRO's proposal to send another communications satellite INSAT-3A into orbit with the help of Europe's Arianespace in mid-2000. The 2.5-tonne INSAT-3A satellite will carry a very high resolution radiometer, communications transponders and a camera similar to that fitted onto India's INSAT-2E satellite launched this year. ISRO built the 52-million-dollar INSAT-2E communications satellite which was launched on April 3. More than half of INSAT-2E's capacity has been sold for 100 million dollars to the 104-nation Washington-based consortium Intersat -- the first foreign buyer of Indian satellite transponders. INSAT-2E's footprint covers all of Asia and Australia. It is the most advanced satellite built by ISRO and has a 12-year lifespan.



Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi (R) is escorted by his Chinese counterpart Zhu Rongji past a military honour guard during a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People Friday in Beijing. Obuchi met with Zhu for talks aimed at smoothing China's entry into the WTO and trying to ease concerns about Japan-US security ties. - AFP photo

Taliban for talks with US on Laden's fate

ISLAMABAD, July 9: Afghanistan's Taliban militia Thursday confirmed they were harbouring Saudi terrorism suspect Osama bin Laden and urged talks with the United States over his fate, a report said, reports AFP. The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted the Taliban's chief spokesman as saying the 41-year-old Saudi millionaire was living in Afghanistan "under the protection of a special security commission." No one except the special commission knew of Bin Laden's precise whereabouts, spokesman Wakil Ahmed told the private news agency without elaborating. The Taliban have previously said they do not know the whereabouts of Bin Laden, whose suspected presence in Afghanistan prompted the White House this week to slap sanctions against the Islamic militia.

Washington suspects Bin Laden of masterminding attacks on the US embassies in the East African cities of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam last August which killed 224 people. Ahmed said the Taliban wanted to discuss Bin Laden's fate with Washington. "We are ready to hold talks with the United States on Osama," the chief spokesman told AIP. "We want to resolve the issue but nobody is willing to listen to us," he said. Washington, conceding that diplomacy and a record five-million-dollar reward had failed to dislodge Bin Laden, froze Taliban financial and property assets in the US and banned US trade with the militia. In an executive order signed Monday, President Bill Clinton said the sanctions would "deepen the international isolation of the Taliban, limit its ability to support terrorist net-

works, and demonstrate the need to conform to accepted norms of international behaviour." The US administration has viewed with scepticism claims by Taliban leaders that they do not know where Bin Laden is hiding. A senior Taliban official, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, said in Washington on Tuesday that the militia would act against Bin Laden only if there were "clear evidence" he was using Afghanistan as a terrorism base. "If there is any clear evidence provided to us that Osama bin Laden is using Afghanistan's soil against any other country, we will do action upon that," he said. "We have declared several times that Osama bin Laden is not allowed to use Afghan soil against any country or any nationals," he added ahead of talks with State Department officials.

Vajpayee warns Pakistan over separatist unrest in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, July 9: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee warned Pakistan on Friday against fanning separatist unrest in India's insurgency-ridden northeastern states, reports AFP. Vajpayee was on a day-long visit to Assam state to evaluate army reports that Pakistani intelligence agents are working in tandem with scores of separatist outfits in the northeast. "We shall foil all attempts by [Pakistan] to aid and abet separatist military in India's northeast, like we did to frustrate the Pakistanis in Kashmir," Vajpayee said in a speech opening an oil refinery 225 kilometers (140 miles) east of the Assamese capital Guwahati. India launched a major military offensive in Kashmir on May 9 to evict Muslim infiltrators who crossed the Kashmiri border with Pakistan and set up mountain-top bunkers on the Indian side. "Indian troops will fight until the last of the Pakistan intruders leave our territory," Vajpayee said.

His visit took place amid heavy security and separatist rebel protests against the Kashmir conflict. Separatists here have stepped up their activities in the past month to take advantage of the absence of large numbers of federal troops redeployed to the fighting in Kashmir. Special troop reinforcements had to be brought in to provide adequate security for Vajpayee's whistle-stop visit to Assam. Nearly 20,000 troops, paramilitary forces and police have been mobilised for the visit, and Guwahati looked like a city under siege Friday. Most residents stayed indoors in response to a strike called by four powerful rebel groups. The outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam, National Socialist Council of Nagaland, Manipur People's Liberation Front and the Tripura People's Democratic Front issued a statement denouncing the conflict in Kashmir. "The Kashmir Valley is un-

der the occupation of barbaric colonial Indian rulers... (Indian troops) have been killing Kashmiri freedom fighters." The statement also said Vajpayee had come to the northeast to try to "win over some reactionary elements and use them against the freedom struggle." The army has accused Pakistani intelligence agents of working hand-in-glove with rebel outfits in the north-east and targeting oil pipelines. New Delhi also insists that Pakistani troops are fighting alongside the Islamic infiltrators in Kashmir -- a charge Islamabad denies. More than 10,000 people have been killed in separatist-linked violence in Assam over the past two decades, and Vajpayee voiced regret that young people in Assam and other neighbouring states continued to resort to armed insurgency. "But I am sure the youths will be frustrated in their design as shown by the Indian forces in Kashmir who are forcing the Pakistani infiltrators to go back," he said.

Troops-rebels' clash leaves 77 dead in Colombia

BOGOTA, July 9: As many as 77 people were feared dead yesterday in heavy fighting that erupted in mountains on the edge of Bogota as hundreds of Marxist rebels prepared to stage a spectacular attack on the capital, the Colombian Army said, reports Reuters. An army spokeswoman said up to 40 crack counterinsurgency troops and 37 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas died in the battle that began at dawn around the Andean village of Gutierrez, 25 km south of Bogota. She added that two other army units, totalling 96 men, were missing after they lost radio contact shortly after midday. The fighting was the worst in a series of rebel attacks and appeared to be the heaviest defeat for the military since the government and the FARC launched formal peace talks in early January.

UN reforms may limit veto power of 'Big-5'

GENEVA, July 9: Reforms which could limit the United Nations Security Council's power of veto and give more muscle to the organisation's General Assembly were discussed here on Thursday, reports AFP. Senior UN officials, including High Commissioner for Refugees Mary Robinson, and non-governmental organisations are meeting at the UN's European headquarters to discuss subjects for the General Assembly's first meeting of the new millennium, which is scheduled for the final quarter of next year. The two-day meeting is chaired by Maltese President Guido de Marco, who proposed changes to the power of veto held by the Security Council's five permanent members - the United States, China, France, Russia and Britain. He proposed that a veto could only be tabled if at least two countries voted against a decision, a change which would

limit the possibilities of blocking a vote. At present only one negative vote from a permanent member is required for power of veto. De Marco also suggested that the UN's main deliberative body - meet three times a year instead of once. Thursday's meeting agreed on the need to link non-political questions with UN decisions. The participants also wanted to see an approach integrating economic development, human rights and peace and security. The executive secretary of the UN's European Economic Commission, Yves Berthelot, put forward a proposal to hold a forum of non-political participants early next year in an bid to push the UN's 185 member states towards reform. The proposals will be forwarded to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan for consideration ahead of the General Assembly.

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**Kazakh FM meets Jiang:** Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev, in China on a nine-day official visit has met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, state media reported yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing. Jiang expressed confidence in developing ties with Kazakhstan and said he is looking forward to a visit by Kazakh President Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev to China this year, Xinhua news agency reported. Both countries have smoothly resolved whatever remaining border disputes they have and the 1,700-km border shared by the two countries is legally defined as a border without any problem, he said.

**Fire kills 5 in St Petersburg:** Five people were killed early yesterday after two explosions, followed by a fire, ripped through a Saint Petersburg apartment block, the Russian television station NTV reported, AFP says from Moscow. Interfax news agency earlier reported a toll of six dead. The fire broke out on two floors of the block, located by the Fontanka canal in the centre of the city, the reports said. The blast was apparently caused by gas, according to early inquiries, Moscow Echo radio said, quoting local officials.

Serbian leader for referendum on Milosevic's fate

PROKUPLJE, Yugoslavia, July 9: Serbian opposition leader Zoran Djindjic called Thursday for a referendum to be held on the future of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, reports AFP. "Nothing can justify NATO (bombings). We cannot dismiss them, but we can dismiss" the Yugoslav president, Djindjic told an opposition rally in this southern Serbian town, which attracted more than 4,000 people. "We must have a referendum this year for Milosevic or for Serbia. His regime has come to the point where the choice has to be made," Djindjic said. He said the Serbian Orthodox Church, which had also demanded Milosevic's resignation, called for "a prominent government to be formed" and urged the need "for reforms and foreign economic assistance." The rally, the third in Serbia organised by the opposition Alliance For Change, dominated by Djindjic's Democratic party, was held in a tense atmosphere.

after Milosevic's allies earlier announced they would hold a simultaneous rally in support of the Yugoslav president. But the officials of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) decided to cancel the gathering, although groups of pro-Milosevic supporters came to the square and attempted to disrupt the opposition rally. Witnesses said a local SPS official had fired the shots, while several dozen pro- and anti-Milosevic supporters clashed in a nearby park. Among them were a dozen former partisans from World War II, who shouted: "We overthrow Hitler, we will not allow traitors to speak here." The opposition supporters booed them, yelling "Red gang," and accusing Milosevic of betraying Kosovo. In the town, which has a population of 35,000, residents warned of possible clashes between the two rival camps. "The tensions are very high. It is obvious they want to provoke a civil war," Milan Pekic, 62, an opposition supporter, said.

Baghdad asks Turkey to pull out from N Iraq

BAGHDAD, July 9: Iraq demanded yesterday that Turkey immediately and unconditionally pull out of the north of the country, reports AFP. "The Turkish authorities are called on to withdraw their troops immediately and unconditionally from northern Iraq," a parliament spokesman said as Parliament met. "The Turkish incursion is a flagrant violation of international norms and the principles of good neighbourliness," he was quoted by the official INA news agency as saying. Turkey's NTV news channel reported Monday that about 10,000 Turkish troops moved into mountainous northern Iraq early Saturday in a drive against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels sheltering in the region.

Barak vows to pursue peace on all tracks

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt, July 9: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Friday he was determined to pursue peace with Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians without jeopardising the security of the Jewish state, reports AFP. "I am confident we have an opportunity, we have to exploit it to bring a new momentum to the peace process," he said at a joint press conference with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. But he said his efforts to reach peace accords on the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks would go ahead "without risking our security or vital interests." "I am determined to look for ways to go forward without giving any preference and with-

out leaving any track or any issue behind," he said. "We have to make a serious effort backed by the leaders and peoples of all the region to put an end to the 100 years of conflict between Israel and the Arabs, and leave a set of independent strong nations." Barak, who took office only on Tuesday, held two hours of talks with Mubarak in the first of a series of meetings with key players in the peace process, including Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and US President Bill Clinton. Barak had been expected to suggest in his meeting with Mubarak that parts of the Wye River accord with the Palestinians be bypassed so that the two sides can enter directly into

negotiations or a permanent peace accord. The Wye accord, which calls for further Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank, was signed in October by Barak's right-wing predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu but frozen two months later. "Israel abides by international agreements that have been taken by any previous government, we expect all parties to respect their parts and move forward in the peace process," Barak said. Asked about his policy on the thorny issue of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories, he said the new government has "clear guidelines." "We are not going to build new settlements, we are not going to dismantle ones," he said.



Supporters of the opposition climb on the fountain in downtown Prokuplje and wave a flag during a protest rally organised by the Democratic Party Thursday, some 260km south of Belgrade. Gunshots rang out as more than 4,000 people gathered for a rally against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. - AFP photo