

## Adequate security cover for Dilip Kumar

NEW DELHI, July 15: The centre has decided to provide adequate security cover to film star Dilip Kumar who is under pressure from Shiv Sena to return Pakistan's Nishan-e-Imlaik award, reports PTI.

Dilip Kumar, who along with his actress wife Saira Banu, called on union home Minister L K Advani here this evening. He told reporters that the government has confirmed about providing adequate security cover to him in the wake of Shiv Sena's threat.

The thespian, who spent about an hour with Advani at his residence, termed the meeting as only a courtesy call.

Kumar, who decided not to return Pakistan's second highest civilian award after a meeting with Prime Minister A B Vajpeyi on Sunday, had on Tuesday urged the centre to take proactive steps to defuse the situation arising out of Shiv Sena's insistence that the return the award in the wake of Pakistani incursion in Kargil.

If the situation is not defused it could take a communal colour. The film star had told PTI.

Dilip Kumar also called on Communist Party of India General Secretary A B Bardhan and National General Secretary D Raja.

## Assam separatist group offers peace talks

GUWAHATI, India, July 15: A tribal separatist group in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam has announced a unilateral ceasefire, and said it was ready to talk peace with New Delhi, reports AFP.

The outlawed Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT) said its decision to suspend all operations was taken in view of the military conflict in Kashmir.

India is facing a national crisis, and in such a situation foreign intelligence agencies are taking advantage to work against the country. So we have decided to stop our operations," a BLT spokesman said.

"We would also like to hold talks with the government."

The BLT is one of the three main separatist groups active in the Bodoland-dominated tribal region of Assam, a sprawling state rich in oil and tea and bordering Bangladesh.

The BLT was blamed in October last year for a powerful bomb explosion in this Assam capital which killed 10 people and wounded 50 others.

Some 10,000 people have been killed in the past 10 years in separatist and ethnic violence in Assam.

## SC defers execution of Rajiv killers

NEW DELHI, July 15: India's Supreme Court Thursday deferred until August 16 the execution of four people sentenced to death for the assassination of former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, reports AFP.

The four, two Indians including a woman and two Sri Lankans, had appealed to the court for a review of the sentence.

The Supreme Court had in June postponed the execution on the same grounds.

On May 11, 19 people were freed after being acquitted of murdering Gandhi, but the death sentence passed in January last year was confirmed for the remaining four.

Rajiv Gandhi, premier from 1984 to 1989, was killed by a female suicide bomber belonging to Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at an election rally in the southern state of Tamil Nadu on May 21, 1991.

As premier, Gandhi had sent Indian troops to Sri Lanka in 1987 to help end an ethnic separatist war being waged by the LTTE.

The troops soon became the target of the LTTE, who saw them as siding with the Sri Lankan government. Nearly 1,200 Indian soldiers died before the force was finally withdrawn.

The LTTE has repeatedly denied it killed Gandhi.

## Ex-Afghan king Zahir Shah's aide killed in Pakistan

QUETTA, Pakistan, July 15: An Afghan politician linked to Afghanistan's former king Zahir Shah has been assassinated in Pakistan, officials and police said Thursday, reports AFP.

Abdul Ahad Karzai, a former diplomat, was gunned down by two assailants late Wednesday as he came out of a mosque after prayers, an official statement said.

The gunmen, armed with automatic rifles, arrived on a motorcycle and drove off immediately after the shooting.

Two other worshippers, both Pakistanis, were also killed in the firing outside the mosque located at a marketplace in Quetta, capital of Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province bordering Afghanistan, the statement said.

Family sources said Karzai, who had been living in the United States, had arrived in Pakistan a few days ago.

Police said they had no immediate idea as to the motive for the killings.

Raids were conducted by the police in different parts of the city overnight in a bid to trace the killers, a police spokesman said.

## China claims neutron bomb capability

BEIJING, July 15: China, in a fresh bid to dispel a US congressional report that charged it with stealing American nuclear secrets, said today it had mastered neutron bomb technology in the 1970s and 1980s, reports Reuters.

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The demonstrators from the Shiv Sena party were detained after they smashed through a police barricade near parliament. There was no other violence and the activists were expected to be freed later in the day.

The Shiv Sena is a rabidly anti-Muslim party headed by Bal Thackeray, a firebrand Hindu politician who is also an ally of India's ruling Hindu nationalistic party.

Thursday's demonstration was organised to demand an end to the New Delhi-Lahore bus service in protest at the Pakistan-backed Muslim incursion into Indian Kashmir.

The infiltration forced New

"Since China has already possessed atom bomb and H-bomb technologies, it is quite logical and natural for it to master the neutron bomb technology through its own efforts over a reasonable period of time," said the report by the Information Office of the State Council, China's cabinet.

The 80-page report, titled "Facts Speak Louder Than Words and Lies Will Collapse By Themselves — Further Refutation of the Cox Report," said China conducted its first nuclear test in October 1964 and its first hydrogen bomb test in June 1967.

The Cox report, released on May 25 by a special house panel chaired by Representative Christopher Cox, said China had acquired US secrets about seven nuclear weapons and the neutron bomb through 20 years

of espionage and tested a neutron bomb in 1988.

The rebuttal to the Cox Report was presented by Information Office Minister Zhao Qizheng, who largely repeated criticisms of the US spying allegations he made at a news conference in late May, when he accused US officials of slander and racism.

Zhao, reading from the report, said the Cox report's portrayal of Chinese scientists, students and businessmen as part of Beijing's espionage activities was "typical racial discrimination and a deadly insult to the Chinese nation."

It marks the reappearance of McCarthyism ... and reflects the aberrant personality of some American politicians hostile to China's development and becoming powerful," it said.

Neutron bombs are nuclear

bombs with higher levels of radiation and lower levels of explosive power.

"What that means is that it kills people while leaving infrastructure in place," said Robert Karniol, Bangkok-based Asian correspondent of Jane's Defence Weekly.

You can sort of blow up a city and kill everybody in the city but the buildings don't get destroyed," he said. Karniol said he did not know how far China had advanced its neutron programme.

China is one of the world's five declared nuclear powers, along with the United States, Russia, Britain and France.

India and rival Pakistan conducted nuclear tests last year, and both have missiles and are considered capable to arm them with nuclear warheads.

## Taiwan on high alert

TAIPEI, July 15: Taiwan is on high alert and closely monitoring the movements of the People's Liberation Army, the defence ministry said Thursday after Beijing warned it would crush any attempts to split the mainland, reorts AFP.

"It is our practice to always stand on high alert," an official from the military spokesman's office said.

"We are also closely watching deployment of the Chinese Communist forces," he said.

Beijing threatened Wednesday to use force against the island to protect national sovereignty after President Lee Teng-hui declared that Taiwan was a separate, sovereign state.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army is ready at any time to safeguard the territorial integrity of China and smash any attempts to separate the coun-

try," Defense Minister Chi Haotian said.

Taiwan is a province of China, and China's sovereignty and territorial integrity allow no separation," Chi said, according to a Xinhua report.

Lee infuriated Beijing by telling Germany's Deutsche Welle radio station Saturday that cross-strait ties should be redefined as "nation-to-nation, or at least as special state-to-state relations."

He restated his sovereignty claim Tuesday telling Honduras Foreign Minister Roberto Flores Bermudez that: "The Republic of China (Taiwan's official name) has always been a sovereign state, not a local government."

Beijing had been blinded to historical and legal realities in viewing Taiwan as a "renegade province," he said.

## Anti-Pakistan protest in Delhi: 1000 held

NEW DELHI, July 15: About 1,000 Hindu militants were arrested here Thursday after a noisy street protest to demand the scrapping of an India-Pakistan bus service launched five months ago, reports AFP.

The demonstrators from the Shiv Sena party were detained after they smashed through a police barricade near parliament. There was no other violence and the activists were expected to be freed later in the day.

The Shiv Sena is a rabidly anti-Muslim party headed by Bal Thackeray, a firebrand Hindu politician who is also an ally of India's ruling Hindu nationalistic party.

Thursday's demonstration was organised to demand an end to the New Delhi-Lahore bus service in protest at the Pakistan-backed Muslim incursion into Indian Kashmir.

The infiltration forced New

Delhi to launch a major military offensive on May 9 to evict the infiltrators.

After what Pakistan has done by sending armed guerrillas into Kashmir, this bus service must not be continued any longer," said Narendra Bhatti, a party leader.

The bus service was inaugurated amid great fanfare by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who took the bus to travel to Pakistan and hold talks with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif.

The service was hailed as a step in promoting peace between the two South Asian rivals, who have fought three wars since independence in 1947 -- two of them over Kashmir.

The Shiv Sena had threatened to sabotage the bus service in February itself but its leader Thackeray was eventually persuaded by New Delhi to fall in line.



Activists from the Hindu extremist group Shiv Sena shout slogans as they unfurl a giant banner in front of a police barricade during a protest near parliament yesterday.

— AFP photo

## BRIEFLY

**Floods kills 2 in China:** Twenty-four hours of torrential rain in parts of northwest China have left two dead and two missing, local officials said Thursday, AFP reports from Beijing.

"We can confirm that two people have died and two are missing but cannot offer any further information at this point," a spokesman for the Yanchi County Anti-Flooding Headquarters told AFP. Heavy rain, including 120 millimetres (4.8 inches) in just two hours on Tuesday morning, caused floods affecting more than 60,000 people in Yanchi County in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, the Xinhua news agency said.

**Arafat meets Egyptian FM:** Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat held brief talks at Helsinki airport Wednesday with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mussa, the Finnish daily Helsingin Sanomat reported, AFP reports from Helsinki.

The two, who are separately making visits to Finland, have each scheduled talks on the peace process Thursday with Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, whose country holds the rotating six-month presidency of the European Union (EU). Arafat's airplane landed an hour before schedule in order to synchronise his arrival in Finland with the Egyptian delegation, the report said.

**Chinese President in Mongolia:** Chinese President Jiang Zemin arrived Thursday for a three-day state visit to Mongolia aimed at consolidating relations into the 21st century, AFP reports from Ulan Bator.

Jiang was greeted at the Bryant Ueha Airport by Mongolia's Minister of External Relations, Nyam-Osorin Tuya, ambassador to China Dagva Tsakhlgaan and the Chinese Ambassador to Mongolia, Qi Zhijia. Jiang is accompanied by Vice-Premier Qian Qichen and an entourage of officials and Chinese journalists. "China has always attached great importance to its relations with Mongolia. It is China's firm policy to further consolidate and develop a long-term, stable, sound and mutually trusting Sino-Mongolian relationship," Jiang quoted from the Xinhua news agency, told reporters at the airport.

**Colombian peace talks Monday:** Peace talks between the Colombian government and the nation's most powerful leftist rebel group will open on Monday, officials said Wednesday, after six days of the fiercest guerrilla offensives in decades, AFP reports from Bogota.

The government's High Commissioner for Peace, Victor Ricardo, announced the date for the talks -- which had been postponed -- following a meeting with leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The talks were initially to begin July 7 but were put off to ensure the participation of international monitors.

**Blasts kill two in Algeria:** Two people were killed and four were injured when bombs set by Islamic extremists exploded in the Larbaa region about 30 kilometres (20 miles) from the Algerian capital, a paper reported Thursday.

El-Sahafa daily said a first bomb in the area southeast of the capital blew up overnight Tuesday, killing two people and wounding two others. The second device, laid near a water tank, injured two soldiers the same night. The explosions occurred as Algeria was hosting a well-attended 35th summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which took place from Monday to Wednesday and where leaders from across the continent tackled means of settling conflicts by peaceful means.

## No possibility of immediate resumption of Indo-Pak talks

MUMBAI, July 15: There was no possibility of immediate resumption of talks between Islamabad and New Delhi despite Pakistan's assurance of withdrawal of intruders from Kargil sector, union information and broadcasting Minister Pramod Mahajan said here yesterday.

Though the Sharif government has assured that it will ask Mujahideens to withdraw from the Kargil, the Pakistani premier has made no commitment towards the sanctity of the line of control and has even supported the Mujahideens, Mahajan told a news conference.

The two, who are separately making visits to Finland, have each scheduled talks on the peace process Thursday with Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, whose country holds the rotating six-month presidency of the European Union (EU). Arafat's airplane landed an hour before schedule in order to synchronise his arrival in Finland with the Egyptian delegation, the report said.

**Five killed in Iranian crackdown: Amnesty**

in a statement.

The Iranian authorities have said two people were killed in the worst unrest in the Islamic Republic since the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

One person died Thursday night in a police raid on a Tehran University dormitory -- the incident which sparked six days of student unrest -- and the other during protests in the northwestern city of Tabriz.

Hundreds of protesters were arrested during street battles Tuesday, many of them detained by thousands of plainclothes Islamic militiamen who patrolled the city centre armed with clubs, chains and makeshift weapons.

**Taliban won't force out Laden**

DUBAI, July 15: The Islamic Taliban militia in power in Kabul refused to expel suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden who is wanted in the United States unless he accepts an Arab newspaper reported Thursday, reports AFP.

"We have no objection if bin Laden accepts," the official spokesman for the Taliban supreme leader, Mulla Mohammad Omar, told the London-based Ashraf Al-Awsat.

"But we will not take him over to another party and we will not force him to leave Afghanistan," said Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel.

The paper said the spokesman was interviewed during a visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), one of only three countries to have recognised the Taliban's government.

His mission was to examine the possibility of bin Laden being tried in a neutral country where he has not been indicted, it said.

Mutawakel said the Taliban

had also had "meetings and contacts on the telephone" with the US administration via the US embassy in Islamabad and the Taliban representative in New York, to discuss bin Laden's case.

"We will not allow him to carry out hostile activities against others from our territory," he pledged, adding that the assurance had been passed on to both Washington and Riyadh.

Washington suspects the millionaire Islamic militant who has been stripped of his Saudi nationality of plotting the August 1998 attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam that killed 224 people.

Bin Laden was also implicated in the bombing of New York's World Trade Centre in 1993 and of a US military complex in Saudi Arabia in 1996.

According to Mutawakel, Bin Laden is in Afghanistan under the guard of a special surveillance committee, but the Taliban leadership is not aware of his exact whereabouts.

## Voter registration begins in E Tim