

All infiltrators have quit Kashmir: Indian army

SRINAGAR, India, July 18: All the Indian fighters who infiltrated Indian Kashmir and sparked a massive two-month Indian military offensive have vacated the Himalayan state, an army officer said Sunday, reports AFP.

"All the infiltrators are totally out of Kashmir," the officer told AFP in Srinagar, the state's summer capital. "The whole area is now fully free from intrusion."

The officer, who requested anonymity, said Indian troops had reached Kashmir's winding border with Pakistan on almost all the main battle zones barring a few isolated pockets.

"We are building new bunkers since the old ones are known to the enemy. There is similar activity on the other side of the border also. We have put up white flags, so have they," he said.

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes announced in New Delhi late Saturday that "the last of the Pakistani regulars has withdrawn from (Kashmir) and the area is now free from infiltrators."

India has ended a two-month offensive to flush out what it says were a mix of Pakistani troops and Muslim militants. Pakistan says they were freedom fighters opposed to Indian rule.

The bodies of two Pakistani soldiers killed in fighting with India were solemnly returned to Islamabad today.

Pakistan's official APP news agency said the pair had been killed on the Line of Control

(LoC) but that their bodies were then taken deeper inside India by Indian forces.

"Their bodies were taken away by Indian army men on retreat in clashes in Kargil sector when the former penetrated into the Pakistani side of the border," APP said.

India's army chief, General Ved Parakash Malik, said New Delhi still needed to confirm the infiltrators had pulled out.

"It's not easy. First of all we have to send patrols, which will physically verify that those positions have been vacated. We will also use helicopters," Malik told Reuters.

National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra said India would have to consider "military and diplomatic measures" to ensure that such incursions did not occur again.

"Of course, we will do a post-mortem to find out what went wrong and what lessons we have learnt from the Kargil episode," Mishra told The Hindustan Times newspaper.

Asked what lessons India had learnt, Mishra complained about a limited defence budget. "Modern equipment including that meant for surveillance has been denied to the armed forces. We will not allow this to happen again."

"We have also learnt that we should speak softly but carry a big stick."

Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told Reuters that Pakistan must endorse the "inviolability" of the LoC as a precondition for talks to start.

Political analysts said India would take an "extremely tough stand" over the resumption of dialogue with Pakistan.

The government will drag its feet over the issue of reopening dialogue with Pakistan," said Rashid Talib, a political analyst. "At least until the elections they will be in no mood to talk as it would interfere in the exploitation of the success."

Analysts said India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party would try to keep the current "upsurge of nationalism" burning at least until general elections in September-October.

"If they can keep that high, I am sure they will be able to come out with a clear mandate during the elections," Talib said.

In Pakistan, the issue of the military's involvement in the conflict generated controversy after the army chief, General Pervez Musharraf, told the BBC that Pakistani troops had sometimes crossed the LoC in "aggressive patrolling" of the line.

India says most of the Islamic infiltrators were Pakistani army regulars. Islamabad has denied the charge, claiming the infiltrators were Muslim "freedom fighters" opposed to Indian rule over Kashmir.

India and Pakistan dispute the ownership of Kashmir and control parts of the picturesque state. They have fought two of their three wars in the past five decades over Kashmir.

The 'curse' strikes Kennedy family once again

WASHINGTON, July 18: The sudden disappearance of John F. Kennedy Jr. and his wife Carolyn Bessette is the latest of a series of tragedies to strike the storied family over several decades, reports AFP.

The closest thing the United States has to a royal family, the Kennedy clan has been marked by tragedy, success and scandal.

John Jr. -- son of assassinated President John F. Kennedy, shot dead on November 22, 1963 -- and his wife and her sister disappeared off the coast of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts late Friday night.

US air force Lieutenant Colonel Steve Roark said late Saturday that searchers had found the site where the airplane went down, but would not say where.

"It's not a missing aircraft anymore," Roark told CNN. "I think we've found the aircraft, or the location of it."

A giant air and sea search for the three ran throughout the day and into the night Saturday.

Searchers said they had found wreckage from the small Piper plane, including luggage, a headrest and carpeting.

The three were on their way to the well-known Kennedy summer family compound in Hyannisport, Massachusetts, to celebrate the wedding of Rory Kennedy -- youngest daughter of Bobby Kennedy, assassinated while running for president in 1968.

Some 80 family members and friends had gathered around the white houses dotting the beaches of this summer resort made famous by this country's most well known political clan.

A spokesman described the family's mood as "somber."

"There are a lot of children running around. That tends to lighten the mood, but obviously there is a great deal of concern today," said Brian O'Connor.



This file photo dated May 28, 1992 shows members of the Kennedy family (L-R) Sen. Edward Kennedy, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, John F. Kennedy Jr., Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg and Edward Schlossberg watching as Connecticut Governor Lowell Weicker receives the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award in Boston. A small plane piloted by John F. Kennedy Jr. was reported missing over the Atlantic Ocean en route to Martha's Vineyard, MA, on Saturday.

But after the announcement of the discovery of debris, silence fell over the group of white and green cottages here.

The Kennedy fortune was built by patriarch Joe, but was marked by tragedy from the beginning.

His oldest son, Joseph Jr.,

was killed during World War II, and daughter Kathleen Agnes Kennedy died in a plane crash in France in 1948.

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Kennedy, died at just three months of age in 1963.

That same year, his father and hero to the nation, John F. Kennedy, was shot dead while driving in an open-top car in Dallas, Texas.

On December 1997, Michael Kennedy, 39, son of presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy who was murdered in 1968, died in a ski accident in Colorado.

Michael Kennedy had been one of the pillars of the family, but his death followed a year of scandal over a sexual affair with the baby-sitter of his three children. The scandal ended his 16-year marriage with Victoria Gifford.

Just a few years earlier, in April 1984, Michael's brother David Anthony died of a drug overdose at age 28.

David was only 13 when he saw his father, Bobby being killed in Los Angeles.

In 1991, under the intense scrutiny of the American media and public, William Kennedy Smith, son of Jean Kennedy Smith, Bobby and John F. Kennedy's sister, was tried and acquitted of a rape charge.

Scandal also dogged the older generation.

A car accident on the island of Chappaquiddick -- just off Martha's Vineyard -- in 1969 which killed his young companion Mary Jo Kopechne, wiped out any presidential dreams young Senator Edward "Teddy" Kennedy may have had.

A final tragic figure is Rosemary, John and Bobby's sister and clan-founder Joe and Rose Kennedy's third child.

Mildly mentally retarded, Rosemary was lobotomised in 1941 and is now interned in a special home in Wisconsin.

Islamic party airs support for Megawati's presidency

JAKARTA, July 18: A major Indonesian Muslim party on Sunday aired support for opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri's bid for the presidency, as the country's second biggest Islamic group says it has no objection to a woman taking the top office, reports AFP.

"PKB states that it accepts the results of the elections and congratulates PDI-Struggle," Matri Abdul Jalil, chairman of the National Awakening Party (PKB), was quoted as saying by the Suara, Pembaruan evening daily.

PKB placed third in June 7 elections behind Megawati's Indonesian Democracy Party-Struggle (PDIP) and the ruling Golkar party. PDIP took 33.7 per cent of the valid vote returns, Golkar 22 per cent and PKB 12.6 per cent.

Speaking in the central Java

island city of Yogyakarta, Jalil said it would be "unsporting" for his party to press for its own presidential candidate in the face of PDIP's electoral win.

"It should be best if we all jointly give the chance to PDIP and its presidential candidate, Megawati," he added.

Jalil also said he hoped as the winner of the elections, Megawati and her party would immediately begin to make contacts with other parties, especially reformist parties, to form a "reform government."

Meanwhile, an executive of the Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second largest Islamic group, said it would not object to a woman president if the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), the highest legislative body, decided to appoint one in November.

"Whoever will later occupy

the presidential seat, be it Megawati or anyone else, Muhammadiyah will accept it," Muhammadiyah vice chairman Abdul Munir Mulhan said in Jember, East Java province.

Mulhan's comments followed statements by several Muslim politicians who said they would not accept or support a woman as leader of the world's largest Muslim-populated nation.

"On the matter of the national leadership and who will be the next president, Muhammadiyah will leave it entirely to the existing mechanism," Mulhan said.

However, he added his statement did not mean Muhammadiyah, an organisation with some 28 million adherents, was backing the presidential bid of Megawati Sukarnoputri.

US violent crime rate at lowest since 1973

WASHINGTON, July 18: Violent crime in the United States fell to its lowest level since the Justice Department began tracking rates in 1973, the Department's Bureau of Statistics (BJS) reported Sunday, reports AFP.

Violent crimes include rape, sexual assault, robbery and assault, and property crimes like burglary, theft and motor vehicle theft.

Attorney General Janet Reno said the drop reflected the administration's overall crime strategy was working.

"There is no one reason as to why violent crime has fallen in recent years -- it's a combination of factors" including more police on the streets and better prevention programs, she said.

From 1993 to 1998, there were "significant decreases in every major type of violent and

property crime" the survey measures.

"Virtually every demographic group experienced substantial drops in violent victimization," the BJS report said.

Over the five-year period, the violent crime rate fell by seven percent, while murders declined by eight percent, according to preliminary data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime reports.

About 40 per cent of robbery victims and nine percent of rape or sexual assault victims were threatened with a weapon.

According to data for 1998, about half the violent crime victims and more than 70 per cent of rape or sexual assault victims knew their attackers.

Approximately 50 per cent of aggravated assault victims knew their assailants.

Americans stand by their most famous family

NEW YORK, July 18: Americans nationwide expressed sympathy and support for the Kennedy family Sunday after a plane piloted by John F. Kennedy Jr. disappeared with his wife and sister-in-law on board off the east coast of the United States, reports AFP.

As hopes faded of finding the passengers alive, admirers left flowers in front of the Kennedys' loft in TriBeCa, a former industrial neighborhood now home to some of New York's chic younger set.

But North Moore Street was mostly filled with television trucks as major US networks ran continuous coverage of the search for the plane, which disappeared en route to Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

Most scheduled weekend television programming was bumped off the air to allow for non-stop coverage of the disappearance of Kennedy, wife Carolyn and her sister, Lauren Bessette, who had been heading to a Kennedy family wedding.

At Yankee Stadium here, fans were asked to rise during a baseball game Saturday for a moment of silence and prayer for the family.

Just outside Washington, at Arlington National Cemetery where Kennedy's mother, Jacqueline, and father were buried, a note attached to some flowers read: "Praying for John Jr."

Kennedy's disappearance triggered an outpouring of support for the family while drawing attention to its tragic history.

"It's a balance between a charmed life and a great deal of tragedy," said Mark Rubin, from Tyler, Texas, who was visiting the Arlington site with his family.

"On the streets of Washington, Americans expressed concern for the fate of the plane's passengers as the search dragged on into Sunday.

"I'm worried. I'm not boo-hooing, but I'm worried. It's something you don't want to hear of it happening to someone," said Missy Taylor.

At Martha's Vineyard, Francine Weiner, 51, a first-grade teacher from New Jersey, spent three hours standing on a

rock for a look at the Kennedy property.

"I'm from the generation that grew up with the Kennedys," said Weiner, who was on vacation in Yarmouth, on Cape Cod. "They are part of the American family. This is a sad thing."

"He is a child of tragedy," Time magazine editor Hugh Sides told CBS News. "He is part of the whole mystique and legend of the Kennedy clan. He had become its flag bearer."

In Dallas, wreaths were placed at the former Texas School Book Depository from where Lee Harvey Oswald shot President John Kennedy in 1963.

In California for a political event, Vice President Al Gore paid tribute to the younger Kennedy, saying he had carried

himself with "enormous grace" that should inspire the country now.

Gore described him as an "extraordinary young man, at the high noon of his life, who offers the promise of contributing so much more to our country."

"Our prayers are with the entire family," Gore said.

President Bill Clinton was still at the presidential retreat Camp David, where he had dined with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Friday.

Clinton made no public statement on the missing plane, but the White House said he was being updated regularly on progress in the search.

"All our prayers and thoughts are with the families of those on board," a White House statement said.

Pinochet denies involvement in HR abuses

LONDON, July 18: Saying that he was a "political prisoner" in Britain, former Chilean dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet has denied direct involvement in human rights abuses in his country, The Sunday Telegraph has reported, says AP.

"I didn't have time to control what others were doing," the general was quoted by The Sunday Telegraph as saying.

Instead, Pinochet said that he concentrated on turning his country away from the Marxist path charted by democratically elected president Salvador Allende, whom he helped overthrow in a 1973 coup.

"I had to sort out the debts. We had inflation running at 500 per cent. We had to restore the land so there would be food for the people. It would be too long to list everything," the newspaper quoted the general as saying.

Spain is seeking Pinochet, who was arrested in London October 16, on charges that he ordered the torture of opponents during his 17-year-rule.

BRIEFLY

Minister shot dead in Samoa: A member of the government of Western Samoa was shot dead Saturday outside a political function, New Zealand's National Radio reported, AP reports from Wellington.

Lualualu Levaula Kamu, the Pacific Island nation's minister for public works, was killed outside an event marking the 20th anniversary of the founding of Samoa's ruling Human Rights Protection Party, the reports said. The death was the first political killing in Samoa since the country gained independence from New Zealand in 1962.

King Fahd in Spain: Saudi Arabia's King Fahd arrived in southern Spain on Saturday night on the first trip abroad by the ailing monarch in five years, Reuters reports from Malaga.

The king and his entourage landed at a heavily guarded section of Malaga airport on the way to the neighbouring town of Marbella, a wealthy resort on Spain's Costa del Sol where he owns a palatial mansion, Saudi officials said. The official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported earlier in the day the King Fahd had left the kingdom on a private visit but made no mention of his destination.

Malaria claims 95 in Kenya: Malaria has claimed more than 95 lives in a district of west Kenya in the past one and a half months, health ministry officials have disclosed, Xinhua reports from Nairobi.

Sixty-one people died in June and 34 others in July in Uasin Gishu District of Rift Valley Province in west Kenya. Out of the 6,225 hospital inmates, 4,106 were infected with malaria in June while this month there were 1,670 patients. Meanwhile, Assistant Minister for Health Basil Criticos said Friday that chloroquine had become ineffective in the treatment of the disease.

Taliban to attend peace talks in Uzbekistan

ISLAMABAD, July 18: Afghanistan's ruling Taliban said Sunday they had agreed to attend this week's United Nations-sponsored peace talks in Uzbekistan, the Afghan Islamic Press reported, reports AFP.

"We have decided to send a delegation to the meeting to explain our stand," the Pakistan-based private news service quoted a Taliban spokesman as saying.

The Taliban delegation will include Information Minister Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi and senior foreign ministry officials, the spokesman said.

The meeting, aimed at finding an end to Afghanistan's intractable civil war, is scheduled for July 20-21 in the Uzbek capital Tashkent.

It will be attended by the Six-Plus-Two group made up of six countries bordering Afghanistan -- China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan -- besides the United States and Russia.

The group has been trying to end the war between the Taliban and their opponents, dominated by a northern alliance which includes former president

Burhanuddin Rabbani and ex-defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood.

It wants the establishment of a broad-based government representing all parties and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan.

The Taliban's agreement to attend the Tashkent meeting followed UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi's talks with Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz here on Saturday.

The Taliban spokesman, however, denied that Pakistan had applied pressure on the hardline Islamic militia to go to Tashkent. "We have not acted under any pressure," he said.

The militia's acceptance marks a turnaround as it had previously declined to attend previous meetings of the group unless all its member nations recognised its government.

Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have so far recognised the Taliban government, which controls about 80 per cent of territory in Afghanistan.

The Rabbani-led alliance retains Afghanistan's seat at the United Nations.

Colombian peace talks postponed

BOGOTA, July 18: Colombia's faltering peace process suffered its latest setback on Saturday when talks were indefinitely postponed because the government and rebels failed to agree on a team of international observers, reports Reuters.

The latest blow to hopes for an end to a three-decade-old conflict came only a week after Marxist guerrillas launched a bloody nationwide offensive, increasing popular calls for President Andres Pastrana to toughen his conciliatory stance.

Defence Minister Luis Fernando Ramirez was in Washington last week to ask the US Congress for \$500 million in military aid to fight the rebels, should peace talks collapse.

"We have an army for peace-time, but we also have an army ready for war," Pastrana told business leaders on Friday, in an hardening of his recent tone.

The talks had originally been scheduled to start on July 7, but were suspended after the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the hemisphere's last surviving 1960-style rebel army, complained their negotiators could not arrive at the negotiating table by that date.

Kuwait parliament urged to grant women rights

KUWAIT, July 18: Kuwait's leaders on Saturday urged the country's newly elected parliament to approve a controversial law granting women full political rights, reports Reuters.

Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah Al-Sabah called on the opposition-dominated assembly, in its first session since general elections on July 3, to approve some 60 decrees, issued during parliament's two-month dissolution, to boost "mutual confidence."

He made special mention of a decree by Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad Al-Sabah granting women full political rights "to complete the steps for a true democracy."

Sheikh Saad described the Emir's order on May 16 as a "courageous, liberating, civilised and developing step... With God's help work will proceed to widen public participation."

The fate of the decrees will become clear on Tuesday when parliament meets to complete the election of various panels which could review them before they are voted on by the house.

The oil-rich state's ruler opened parliament with a call for cooperation between the government and the elected

house after more than two years of clashes led to economic slowdown and a fragile stock market and paralysed state affairs.

"As a citizen with hopes, I look forward to harmonious hearts and one approach in the face of danger," said the Emir, who had dissolved the last parliament on May 4 because of hostility between the two powers.

Prospects for cooperation received a boost on Saturday when parliamentarians elected Jassem al-Kharafi, a former finance minister, as new house speaker, ending a long hold on the key post by a veteran opposition leader Ahmad al-Saadoun.

Saadoun, who led a pro-democracy movement after parliament was dissolved in 1986 for six years, had held the speaker's post in the last three parliaments.

Some MPs have already voiced opposition to the ruler's 60 decrees on religious traditional or constitutional grounds.

A leading expert, Mohammad al-Muqata'a, on Saturday published a study in Kuwaiti dailies in which he stressed that the decrees were unconstitutional.

If the women's rights measure is approved, women will be able to vote and run in the next municipal and parliamentary elections, scheduled for 2003. Female participation could more than double the current small electorate of almost 113,000 men.



US marine units home-based in Okinawa, Japan, take part in a drill after landing in crafts during a joint amphibious operation with South Korean Marines to provide against possible aggression by North Korea, in the East Sea in Pohang, some 270 Km southeast of Seoul on Sunday. A combined task force of some 1,500 US and South Korean marines and sailors conducted a combined amphibious operation in South Korea as North Korea prepares to test-fire a ballistic missile.

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Britain, Iran resume ties

TEHRAN, July 18: Britain and Iran officially marked the resumption of diplomatic relations on Sunday as London's new ambassador to Tehran met with President Mohammad Khatami, reports AFP.

Career diplomat Nick Browne presented his credentials to the Iranian president and conveyed his "best regards" to Khatami and the Iranian people in a ceremony marking the end of a decade of strained relations.

Britain broke off ties with the Islamic republic in 1989 when then supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a religious decree calling for the assassination of British author Salman Rushdie on charges of blasphemy.

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