



Moroccan women gathered outside the Rabat royal palace to pay their respects to the late King Hassan II on Saturday. King Hassan II died on July 23 at the age of 70 after 38 years of reign. — AFP photo

Sharif claims world support for Pak stance on Kashmir

LAHORE, July 25: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif Saturday said it is for the first time that the world community is supporting Pakistan's stance on Kashmir and added India is being pressurised from different quarters in this regard to initiate talks on this issue with Pakistan, reports PPI.

Talking to newsmen at Bagh-e-Jinnah here, he said 20 American Senators had urged US President Bill Clinton to stop Indian assistance if it failed to solve the Kashmir issue. Besides, the parliamentarians of Britain and a number of world leaders urged India to sit across the table and solve the problem according to the wishes of Kashmiri people.

Congress loses another leader in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, July 25: A prominent Muslim leader of India's main opposition Congress party in Kashmir quit Thursday, demanding talks between Muslim separatists and New Delhi, reports AFP.

Mufti Mohammed Sayeed is the second leader to leave the party in the Himalayan state. His daughter, Mehmooba Mufti, resigned three days ago on the same issue.

Sayeed, who was India's home minister in 1989-90, accused the Congress of not showing interest in pressurising the Hindu nationalist government to open a dialogue with Muslim separatists.

The Congress is headed by Italian-born Sonia Gandhi.

"When you can hold talks with Pakistan and America over Kashmir, why not talk with Kashmiris?" asked Sayeed. "The Congress is not in favour of holding unconditional talks with the militants."

Sayeed said he would form a new party in Kashmir to take on the state's ruling regional National Conference party.

India reaffirms commitment to ratifying CTBT

SINGAPORE, July 25: Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh on Sunday reaffirmed his country's commitment to ratifying a nuclear test ban treaty and thanked the United States for its role in easing tensions in Kashmir, US officials said, reports AFP.

Singh, who met here with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on the eve of the ASEAN Regional Forum on security, said New Delhi was also eager to move forward with the Lahore process aimed at resolving differences with Islamabad, the officials said.

"The foreign minister expressed appreciation and gratitude for the US role in helping to bring the Kargil problem to a satisfactory resolution, which it's not quite at yet but is headed in that direction," a senior US official who sat in on the meeting said.

Kargil is within the section of Kashmir under Indian control. However, neither India nor

the United States is ready for outside mediation in the Kashmir issue, despite President Bill Clinton's July 4 intervention with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, officials said.

That meeting, in Washington, resulted in a pledge by Sharif that infiltrators would withdraw from the Indian side of the so-called Line of Control in the disputed region.

Fighting in Kashmir had raised fears among many that the two sides, now both nuclear powers, might escalate the conflict.

"We talked about the importance of the Pakistanis following through on their commitments to withdraw the remaining portions of forces that are around Kargil," Albright told a news conference after the meeting.

Albright said Clinton was interested in making an "early trip" to South Asia to see firsthand the fruits of his efforts but would not commit to a specific

date or any specific future US role in the region.

A senior US official said "we're still in the process of assessing what kind of US role is going to be most productive in trying to help India and Pakistan compose their differences."

"It's fair to say we do not envisage third-party mediation. We're not going to put ourselves forward as a mediator."

"We remain of the view that the best approach to solving the differences is in the Lahore process, but it's something that the two of them need to work out. That leaves open the question of how other countries who are concerned about this can facilitate the process."

Singh, whose government lost a no-confidence vote and will face voters in late September or October, assured Albright that even with a likely shift in government, Delhi was still planning on signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

China won't rule out use of force against Taiwan

SINGAPORE, July 25: China's foreign minister told US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Sunday that China hopes for a peaceful resolution of the present crisis with Taiwan but won't rule out force as an option, reports AP.

The United States "should be careful not to say anything that would fan the flames of Taiwan's independence," Tang Jiaxuan said.

China also is not fully ready to accept repeated US assertions that the May 7 bombing of its embassy in Beijing was an accident, both Tang and Albright suggested in separate news conferences after their luncheon meeting on the sidelines of a conference of Asian leaders.

Albright had some stern words for Taiwan. She suggested Taiwanese officials could

do more to assure China they weren't provoking possible military confrontation by pressing a claim for sovereignty.

There needs to be... a peaceful resolution of this and a dialogue. And I think the explanations thus far don't quite do it," Albright told reporters.

China has expressed its indignation at comments earlier this month by Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui suggesting "state to state" relations between the island and mainland China.

Albright said she reiterated that America still supports a "one China" policy.

The luncheon session was the highest level US-China meeting since the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia.

Tang announced that Chinese President Jiang Zemin has agreed to meet with US President Bill Clinton in New Zealand in September during an economic summit of Asian and Pacific nations.

As to US explanations that the bombing was an accident, Tang said, "This incident has seriously damaged the US-China relationship and left a deep scar in the hearts of the Chinese people. We don't think we've reached the stage where we can say we are satisfied or not."

Albright said that the United States and China "will be restoring some of the relations" put on hold by China. Even so, Albright said, "there are still some subjects on which we disagree."



US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (R) and Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh shake hands in Singapore at the start of bilateral talks yesterday. The two ministers are attending the ASEAN Regional Forum which is scheduled to start today. — AFP photo

Police on alert as thousands gather at JI rally in Lahore

LAHORE, Pakistan, July 25: Police spread out here Sunday as thousands assembled at the headquarters of Pakistan's leading Islamic party for an anti-government march over the "debacle" in Kashmir, reports AFP.

As workers and supporters of Jamaat-i-Islami arrived in motorcades from other cities and towns, the party's chief Qazi Hussain Ahmad alleged widespread police harassment.

"Police have been stopping hired buses and disembarking people travelling to Lahore from various places in Punjab province for the rally," Ahmad told AFP at the party's nerve-centre in the provincial capital.

He vowed that "aggressive" official tactics to subvert the

protest billed by the party as "a million-people march" would fail.

"People of Pakistan will demonstrate their rejection of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's deal with the United States leading to the debacle in Kashmir," Ahmad said.

Some 6,000 people had already gathered at the Jamaat's headquarters called Mansoor to take part in the rally planned to get under way late Sunday after more than a week of hectic mobilisation by the party.

More than a 100 police vans patrolled the streets and riot police were deployed at road-crossings and other key points.

Sharif has been under fire from religious parties and the opposition over his July 4 agreement with President Bill

Clinton leading to the withdrawal of Islamic fighters from strategic peaks they had seized in Indian Kashmir.

Speaking to reporters here late Saturday, Sharif defended his move to de-escalate the Kashmir crisis and said Pakistan had scored a diplomatic victory.

He said the Kashmir issue was now the focus of the international community which wanted Pakistan and India to start talks on resolving the principal dispute plaguing their relations.

Kashmir, divided between Pakistan and India and claimed by both, has been the source of two of the three wars between the South Asian rivals since their independence in 1947.

India orders probe into intrusion into Kashmir

NEW DELHI, July 25: India said Sunday it had ordered an impartial inquiry into the failure to detect the full-scale incursion by Islamic fighters into Kashmir but opposition leaders accused the government of planning a whitewash, reports AFP.

A three-member committee, headed by military analyst and government security adviser K. Subrahmanyam, was set up following a cabinet meeting late Saturday and was asked to report within three months on the intrusion, which almost sparked a war with Pakistan.

Its other members are a former military officer and a senior journalist.

Information Minister Pramod Mahajan said the committee would "review the events leading up to the Pakistani aggression... in Kashmir" and suggest "measures considered necessary to safeguard national security."

"When we say 'events leading

to', it may be intelligence, administrative, political failures. We are not binding the committee with one or two aspects," Mahajan said.

The announcement followed increasing criticism that the ruling Hindu nationalists, facing national elections in September, failed for weeks or months to detect the infiltration by hundreds of heavily-armed Islamic fighters into Indian Kashmir.

The opposition dismissed the inquiry decision as an "inquiry."

The Congress party said it was an attempt to deflect attention from the failures of the "political leadership at the highest level."

The government should have invited leaders of political parties to decide the terms of reference, scope, level and the format of the inquiry, party spokesman Ajit Jogi said.

Said Devendra Dwivedi of the Nationalist Congress party:

"It is an eyewash. The sole purpose of the inquiry is to shut out criticism of the government. It lacks legitimacy."

News reports have said the infiltration possibly began last winter. The presence of the fighters was detected in May and New Delhi ordered a major military offensive to oust them.

India says the intruders were mainly Pakistani regular troops as well as Muslim guerrillas who sneaked into Indian Kashmir and occupied strategic hills overlooking a key supply route.

More than 1,000 combatants were killed on both sides in two months of fierce border clashes before Pakistan asked the "intruders," whom it says comprised only indigenous Islamic guerrillas, to withdraw.

The border clashes were the worst between India and Pakistan in nearly three decades and almost sparked their fourth war since independence in 1947.



Nadhlatu Ulama (NU) organisation leader Abdurahman "Gus Dur" Wahid (C) points to Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri (L), as he chats with National Mandate Party (PAN) Chairman Amien Rais (R) during a Muslim mass prayer meeting at the Senayan stadium in Jakarta yesterday. — AFP photo

Megawati mum about coalition

Tens of thousands join prayer rally

JAKARTA, July 25: Tens of thousands of people rallied Sunday to hear presidential frontrunner Megawati Sukarnoputri, who in her first public comments since a national vote failed to outline plans for a future coalition government, reports AP.

The prayer rally, held on the eve of Monday's release of the final results of last month's election, attracted up to 50,000 opposition supporters at Jakarta's main stadium. It brought together leaders of the largest opposition parties.

"I support Megawati because the people's voice is God's voice," declared Muslim leader Abdurahman Wahid, also known as Gus Dur. His organisation Nadhlatu Ulama planned the event.

Making her first public

speech in weeks, Megawati hailed the elections as a "victory for all the people of Indonesia and not for any single political party."

But she shied away from indicating how her Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, which won 34 per cent of the votes in the June 7 elections, plans to form a governing majority.

According to unofficial tallies, the ruling Golkar Party of ex-President Suharto, garnered 22 per cent of the votes. It hopes to keep incumbent B.J. Habibie in power by forging alliances with smaller Islamic parties and regional representatives.

An electoral college comprising the 500 new members of parliament and 200 regional representatives will meet in November to pick the new head

of state.

To ensure a win for its leadership, presidential bid, Megawati's party needs to build alliances with other reform-minded parties. But some Muslim groups are unhappy with the idea of a woman president in this overwhelmingly Muslim nation and are ambivalent about her approach to reforms.

Megawati is expected to declare an election victory for her party on Tuesday, the second anniversary of an attack by Suharto's troops on her party's headquarters. The incident led to street riots in 1997.

Amien Rais, head of the National Mandate Party, which won 11 per cent of the votes, expressed his support for Wahid as a presidential candidate who could bridge the differences between Megawati and Habibie.

Suicide bomber blasts ferry

Fighting leaves 15 dead in Lanka

COLOMBO, July 25: A Tamil Tiger suicide bomber sank a 310-seater passenger ferry in Sri Lanka Sunday, killing one crew member as fresh fighting left 12 rebels and three soldiers dead, officials said, reports AFP.

At least one frogman of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) entered the Trincomalee jetty in the north-east of the country and carried out the attack at dawn, defence officials said.

They said the remains of a crewman were found later Sunday although it was initially believed there were no casualties because the ferry had been berthed for the night.

The ferry, the MV Newco Endurance, had been brought to Trincomalee, 260 kilometres northeast of here, six days ago to operate a passenger service to nearby Muttur town across the Koddijar bay in Trincomalee. The latest round of fighting

between government forces and the LTTE started in April 1995, when Tigers infiltrated a navy jetty in Trincomalee and blasted two navy gun boats to signal an end to a 100-day truce.

Meanwhile, the defence ministry in a statement said 12 Tiger rebels and three soldiers had been killed in sporadic clashes in the island's north and the east in the past 48 hours.

The three soldiers were killed in the northwestern area of Madhu, the ministry said.

The ministry also said that the attack against the ferry at Trincomalee had cut off a large number of people in the town of Muttur from the main town where they sell their farm produce.

There was no immediate reaction from the LTTE to the military claims.

However, the guerrillas had earlier accepted responsibility for several attacks against for-

eign-owned as well as local merchant vessels and warned that there could be more attacks.

In August last year, the Sri Lankan airforce bombed and destroyed a foreign merchant vessel to prevent Tamil Tiger rebels capturing its cargo. The 21-member Indian crew were freed by the LTTE who took them hostage.

In September 1997, the LTTE sank a Chinese ship, the MV Cordiality, after killing 15 Sri Lankan soldiers who were guarding it near Pulmoddai just south of Mullaitivu on the northeastern coast where the rebels have a key base.

"The LTTE has already cautioned that any vessel in Tamil territorial waters -- foreign-owned or otherwise -- engaged in activities associated with the Sri Lankan military will be considered legitimate military targets," the LTTE said in a statement after that attack.

Demonstration against Milosevic

Belgrade demands UN session over Serb massacre

NIS, Yugoslavia, July 25: Some 25,000 people gathered in this southern Serbian town for an anti-regime rally Saturday, the second organised by controversial opposition leader Vuk Draskovic, reports AFP.

It was the largest turnout at rallies organised by opposition groups, which began in late June to demand the resignation of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

Thousands of supporters of Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) poured into the streets of Nis, 237 kilometres south of Belgrade, for the "Rally for Change."

The rally began with the old Serbian national hymn, "God Give Us Justice," sung by a church choir, as protesters, defying unusually cold weather and strong winds, waved

torches and Serbian flags. "We want changes, not bombing," "Slobodan, leave us alone, resign," "The time has come for you to step down," read placards among the crowd.

A group of protesters carried a huge flag with a red star, the symbol of the communist regime, with a swastika in it and motto: "Never again red or black," alluding to Milosevic's party coalition with the ultra-nationalist party of Vojislav Seselj.

Meanwhile, Yugoslavia has called for an urgent session of the United Nations Security Council following the massacre of 14 Serbs in the Kosovo village of Gracko, the state agency Tanjug reported Sunday.

Vladislav Jovanovic, head of the Yugoslav mission at the UN, made his demand in a letter

sent to Security Council president Hasmay Agam of Malaysia, Tanjug reported from New York.

The letter called on the Council to "take urgent and concrete measures" to protect the Serb and non-Albanian population of Kosovo.

On Saturday, Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic accused the NATO-led peace-keeping force KFOR and the UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) of being "fully and exclusively responsible" for the massacre.

Milosevic demanded that the UN "enable the urgent return (to Kosovo) of the anticipated number of Yugoslav army and police troops in accordance with the military-technical accord" reached between NATO and the Yugoslav army on June 9.

BRIEFLY



British pop singer Phil Collins and his wife Orianne smile as they pose for photographers after their wedding in Lausanne on Saturday. It is Collins' third marriage. — AFP photo

Road mishap claims 5 in Quebec: Five people were killed and two others seriously injured Saturday, in a multiple car crash on a busy highway on the outskirts of Quebec, police officials said, AFP reports from Canada.

Sixteen vehicles, including a truck, were involved in the series of accidents, according to Anne Mathieu, a police spokeswoman. Several people were slightly injured.

Botswana parliament dissolved: Botswana's parliament has been dissolved ahead of the general elections in October this year, a report reaching here said Saturday. Xinhua reports from Johannesburg.

The actual election date is likely to be announced in mid-August, spokesman of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party Botsalo Ntshane, was quoted as saying. The party has been in power since 1966 when the land-locked southern African country won independence from Britain.

Father kills 4 children in Australia: A father gassed himself and his four young children to death in Western Australia on Saturday, the second such murder-suicide within weeks, police said, AP reports from Perth.

Mark Andrew Heath drove his children Sarah, aged 8, Holy, 6, Jak, 4, and Kaleb, 2, into a forest near the town of Donnybrook, 186 miles (300 kilometres) south of the state capital of Perth, and connected a hose from the car exhaust to the interior, said Detective sergeant Barry Leahman.

Myanmar a 'threat' to region: Albright

SINGAPORE, July 25: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright charged Sunday that Myanmar's iron-hand rule was a "threat" to the region and urged Yangon to open dialogue with dissident leader Aung San Suu Kyi, reports AFP.

"I want to make clear that Rangoon (the old name of Myanmar's capital) should talk to the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi," she said at a news conference here on the eve of security talks with Asian leaders.

The opposition National League for Democracy is led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

"I plan to raise the issue of Burma again. What is going on in Burma does pose a threat to the region," she said, without elaborating.

Albright said she would take up "Burma's failure to move towards democracy" at a series of meetings here under the auspices of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).



A Chinese military policeman checking papers and identification card of a man at the Tiananmen Square yesterday as security around the area remained tight in the wake of the banning of Falungong in China. — AFP photo