

International

BJP challenges Sonia to public debate on corruption

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: BJP yesterday dared Congress president Sonia Gandhi to a public debate on the issue of corruption in public life and the responsibility for scams during the last five decades, reports PTI.

Now that Sonia Gandhi has proudly and publicly proclaimed the stuff she is made of, the BJP challenges her to a public debate, BJP leader Arun Jaitley told reporters here.

Attacking Gandhi and her party, he said neither the Congress nor its president need be under any illusion that the people do not know the stuff Sonia Gandhi is made of. This is no mystery at all — just like it is an open secret as to what the stuff her colleagues are made of, is the Congress leader who is not charged with corruption and abuse of office.

On the coming together to Congress with RJD and AIADMK, he said this corrupt 'tri-murti' of Indian politics has single-point minimum programme — how to save their leaders from corruption charges pending against them. It has a single objective — how to beat the prevention of corruption act. And it has a common mascot-corruption in public life.

Death toll in Bihar floods crosses 200

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: The death toll from severe flooding in the eastern Indian state of Bihar has reached 200, it was reported Friday, reports AFP.

Official sources said 17 more flood-related deaths were reported from the several Bihar districts over the last two days, the Press Trust of India reported.

They said hundreds of villages were inundated after a major dyke was breached in the district of Patna, where the state capital is located.

However, they denied that the Bihar capital Patna would be affected by the monsoon floods.

More than 1,500 boats have been commanded to deliver relief materials to some of the estimated four million people who have been affected by the flooding in Bihar.

The floods began late last month after torrential monsoon rains, and the death toll from Bihar, Assam, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh states has breached the 300 mark.

Fresh fighting in Lanka: 14 killed

COLOMBO, Aug 6: At least 12 Tamil Tiger guerrillas, a rebel and a civilian were killed in fresh violence in northern Sri Lanka, the defence ministry here said today, reports AFP.

Government forces shot dead 12 members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in four different clashes in the northern peninsula of Jaffna and the Wanni regions on Thursday, the ministry said.

A member of another Tamil militia group which cooperates with government forces had been shot dead on Thursday night, it said.

Meanwhile, a civilian was killed in a rebel bomb attack against security forces in the northern district of Vavuniya today, officials said adding that at least four soldiers were wounded.

The attack came two days after a woman suicide bomber ambushed a police truck in the same district, killing 13 elite commandos and two civilians.

China blasts US move to expand relations with Taiwan

Air Force ordered to strike first

BEIJING, Aug 6: China yesterday blasted alleged US attempts to expand ties with Taiwan undermining Sino-US relations, reports PTI.

Some China-haters are adding fuel to the flames of the tension across the Taiwan straits. Senators Jesse Helms is one of them, the official China Daily said, referring to an American legislation, which proposed increase in US aid to Taiwan.

Asking the US to stop abetting Taiwan independence, the newspaper said China is neither Iraq nor Yugoslavia, in an obvious reference to America's unilateral military actions in Iraq and Yugoslavia, strongly condemned by China.

Beijing considers Taiwan a rebel province.

Helms, and those US politicians who think they can pay with fire over the Taiwan issue, should not underestimate the Chinese government's resolution to stop the splitism, the paper warned even as a senior official of the Chinese parliament criticised a similar bill

by the US House of representatives.

The paper said Taiwan authorities were emboldened to make splitist statements by anti-China moves by the Chinese language Ming Pao daily said.

Such an initiative is enough to drive the separatists in Taiwan to fancy the island can depend on the US when it declares independence, it said.

The strong words came amid renewed tensions between China and Taiwan sparked by Taiwan president Lee Teng-Hui's insistence that the two sides should deal with each other as state-to-state.

AFP adds from Hong Kong: China's military leaders have ordered the air force to strike first in any confrontation with Taiwanese fighter jets, a Hong Kong newspaper reported today.

With tension between China and Taiwan showing no sign of abating, another newspaper said the Chinese navy was practising naval blockades that would prevent any foreign intervention in a conflict.

The powerful Central Military Commission ordered regional commands in Nanjing and Guangzhou in southeastern China "to step up low-flying training," the independent Chinese language Ming Pao daily said.

The commission, which is chaired by President Jiang Zemin, had given the air force authority to "strike first in gaining the initiative" in any emergency situation that could lead to a clash with Taiwan, the report said, citing unnamed sources.

However, the report said the central leadership's policy was to "continue observation and maintain pressure" on Taiwan.

China has kept up a propaganda barrage against Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui after he declared last month that he wanted "special state-to-state" relations with Beijing.

China claims Taiwan is a renegade province awaiting reunification. The two sides split at the end of the Chinese civil war won by the communists in 1949.

surface-to-surface missile and says it has the capability to mass produce an anti-tank missile called Nag (Cobra).

Kalam also said efforts were "progressing with high intensity" to begin the flight test of a light combat aircraft -- DRDO's most ambitious project which has been delayed for years.

Opening the DRDO conference in the national capital, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said India's military projects had been a success despite attempts by Western countries to block them.

Some countries have joined together and proclaimed technology denials for various political and commercial reasons, he said.

"But Indian scientists have proved that in spite of denials the nation is competent to develop and demonstrate to the world our capabilities to produce high-tech systems, comparable to international standards."

"Such actions will provide strength to our political system to conduct an independent foreign policy, derived from the ability of the nation to under-

pin self-reliance in defence systems," Vajpayee said.

The prime minister also urged the DRDO to focus on military equipment for mountain warfare.

"Technology required for mountain warfare should now be given the highest priority," he said, in reference to criticism that Indian troops were outgunned by Islamic guerrillas during the recent conflict in Kashmir.

Defence Minister George Fernandes said defence research had moved at a steady pace but production schedules must be kept up.

"It will be foolish to think that the enemy will wait till we reach production stages," he said.

Fernandes said this summer's conflict with Pakistan in Kargil in northern Kashmir had demonstrated the need for new technology to help soldiers engaged in mountain warfare.

"Kargil has shown we need to further expand technology needed for mountain warfare," he said.

India to produce two missile systems this yr

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: India will begin the mass production of two missile systems this year, the architect of the country's guided missile technology said here Friday, reports AFP.

"1999 will see very significant milestones," Abdul Kalam told a conference of the heads of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

"Two types of missiles, electronic warfare systems and an unmanned aerial vehicle will reach production after user trials this year," Kalam said at the opening of the two-day DRDO meeting.

The scientist, however, did not specify the types of missiles slated for mass production.

The state-owned DRDO comprises 80 factories and laboratories which are manned by 30,000 personnel.

The quick-reaction Trishul (Trident), with a range of 50 kilometres (31 miles) and Agni-II, which can carry a one-tonne nuclear payload up to 2,500 kilometres (1,550 miles), are in their advanced stage of trials.

India has already begun the production of its 150-kilometre (93-mile) range Prithvi (Earth)

surface-to-surface missile and says it has the capability to mass produce an anti-tank missile called Nag (Cobra).

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Violence in Kashmir kills 18

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 6: An upsurge in separatist activity in Kashmir has claimed another 18 lives, including five members of the Indian security forces, officials said Friday, reports AFP.

Most of the victims died in a serious clash between army troops and Moslem militants overnight Thursday in Kupwara district, 100 kilometers north of the Kashmiri summer capital Srinagar.

According to a defence spokesman, as many as 25 armed militants attacked a camp of the Rashtriya Rifles battalion in Kupwara, sparking a gunbattle in which six separatists and five soldiers were killed.

The attack took place at midnight and fighting continued until 7:00 a.m. when the militants withdrew, the spokesman said, adding that two civilians were wounded in the crossfire.

In three other incidents, three family members of a police informer were shot by suspected militants, three sheep herders were killed in a bomb blast and a separatist leader was shot dead by police.

The latest deaths took to 61 the number of people killed in separatist-linked violence in Kashmir this month.

Officials say the upsurge in militant activity followed the end last month of 10 weeks of bitter fighting between Indian troops and Islamic guerrillas along the disputed Kashmiri border with Pakistan.

As the bronze bell tolled for the victims, survivors pressed their hands together in silent prayer to mark the moment at 8:15 a.m. (2315 GMT) on August 6, 1945, when the uranium-235 bomb exploded 567 meters (1,871 feet) above the city.

Other prayers were held around the country and the parliament fell silent for one minute.

"A century of war, the 20th century spawned the devil's own weapons -- nuclear weapons -- and humankind has yet to free itself of their threat," said the mayor.

The survivors had prevented further "lunacy" -- the use of nuclear weapons, Akiba added.

"Whenever conflict and war break out, there are those who advocate nuclear weapons' use," he said. "This was true even in Xinhua."

The experiment was described by scientists as very successful, thanks to the China-made portable absolute gravimeter, according to Ruey Gang Chang, a Taiwanese scientist aboard the expedition ship, the Snow Dragon.

The professor from Taiwan-based Ming Hsin Institute of Technology said determining the absolute gravity in the Arctic region has great significance for scientific studies in the fields of aviation and space flight and mineral exploration.

Professor E Dongchen of the Wuhan Technology University of Surveying and Mapping indicated that this was the first time the absolute gravity of the Arctic Ocean has ever been determined, and that this is a great contribution to the world. Scientists indicate that they will also conduct experiments to determine the absolute gravity at other sites in the Arctic region, as well as at the South Pole.

Russia plans \$2b fighter sale to China

MOSCOW, Aug 6: Russian state arms dealer Rosvooruzhniy has a deal to sell China Sukhoi fighter aircraft worth about 2 billion dollar, the governor of the region where the planes are made was quoted as saying today, report Reuters.

Russia's Kommersant business daily quoted Khabarovsk Governor Viktor Ishayev as saying a deal for 60 SU-30 planes had been sealed after nearly four years of negotiations. Kommersant quoted unnamed sources as saying the deal was preliminary.

Both Rosvooruzhniy and the Moscow-based Sukhoi design bureau declined to confirm or deny that a deal had been signed.

The SU-30 is a fighter equipped with advanced "thrust vectoring" engine nozzles which give the craft great manoeuvrability. One SU-30 crashed in June at the Paris airshow when the tail of the aircraft hit the ground during a loop.

China paid Russia 2 billion dollar for 22 SU-27 jets in 1996.

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