

### India expels Pak embassy staffer

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: India on Friday expelled a staffer of Pakistan's embassy in New Delhi on charges of spying, and asked him to leave the country within a week, a domestic news agency reported, reports AP.

"Mohammad Safdar... was indulging in activities incompatible with his official status and Pakistan has been asked to withdraw him from India by August 12, 1999," Press Trust of India quoted an official statement as saying.

Press Trust said Pakistan had denied the accusation in Islamabad and called the expulsion part of a "harassment campaign" against Pakistani diplomatic staffers in India.

Uneasy neighbours, Pakistan and India routinely trade charges of spying and mistreatment of their embassy staff. A spying accusation against embassy staffers or diplomats by one country is usually followed by a tit-for-tat expulsion by the other.

In June, India ordered the expulsion of Pakistan embassy employee Dil Fayyaz on spying charges after his government reported him missing. A day later in Islamabad, Indian embassy employee NR Douraswamy was allegedly pulled from his car by Pakistani intelligence officials, held in detention and beaten.

Another Indian staffer Yograj Vij was expelled last month after allegedly being beaten by Pakistani intelligence officials.

### Turkish union leader shot dead

ZONGULDAK, Turkey, Aug 7: The deputy head of Turkey's largest labour union confederation was shot in the head six times and killed early Saturday, the Anadolu news agency reported, says AP.

Semsi Denizler, 49, general secretary of the Turk-Is confederation, became popular when he led some 50,000 striking coal miners on a 265-kilometre protest march from Zonguldak to the capital Ankara for higher pay in 1991.

Police said they arrested a suspect, Cengiz Balik, who had a thick criminal record.

Gov. Ismet Metin of Zonguldak province told television that Balik confessed to the killing and said Denizler had owed him 40 million Turkish lira (some 100 dollar).

But the president of Turk-Is, Bayram Meral, was suspicious. "Obviously, there are other things behind this incident," he said, adding that Denizler had not received any death threats.

The attack comes at a time when the union has been opposing a government measure to increase the retirement age from 45 for women and 50 for men, to 58 for women and 60 for men.

On Friday the union postponed a nationwide one-day strike to protest the measure, in hopes of finding consensus with the authorities.

Unions say the government is giving in to demands of the International Monetary Fund, which agreed to a loan for Turkey last month on condition that the government cuts the deficit.

Turkey saw repeated protests last month against a government cost-cutting plan, including a march in Ankara that drew 100,000 and a one-hour walkout in which thousands participated.

Denizler also headed the mining workers' union Maden-Is in Zonguldak, the heart of Turkey's coal production industry.

### N Korea to buy 40 Russian MiG-21 jets

SEOUL, Aug 7: Impoverished North Korea has agreed to buy 40 Russian MiG-21 fighter jets from a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a South Korean newspaper said today, reports Reuters.

The Chosun Ilbo quoted a government source as saying North Korea has since July been delivering parts of the planes to an army base factory where the jets are being assembled. It did not identify the CIS nation.

Officials at the South Korean defence ministry declined to comment on the report.

The daily said the Seoul government has been closely monitoring the situation as the North reportedly resumed weapons imports, even though the MiG-21 jets were not a threat to South Korea.

Chosun Ilbo said it was the first time in the 1990s that North Korea has imported foreign fighters.

South Korean officials also questioned where the North had raised the money to buy the jets, it said.

The newspaper said North Korea's purchase seemed aimed at replacing some of its approximately 320 old MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighters, or were to be used for training purposes.

The report came as the threat of a North Korean missile launch overshadowed a new round of talks on Thursday by the United States and North Korea seeking a peace settlement to the 1950-53 Korean War.

The two Koreas remain technically at war since their conflict ended in an armed truce rather than a peace agreement.

Concerns over Pyongyang's new Taepodong-2 missile, believed capable of reaching parts of the United States, has grown recently, prompting warnings from Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.

## Israel vows to re-start land pact soon

JERUSALEM, Aug 7: Prime Minister Ehud Barak said on Friday that Israel would begin in three weeks to implement long-stalled handovers of land to Palestinians promised in the Wye River accord, reports Reuters.

Barak's announcement, made in a television interview, meant Palestinians could get control of more West Bank land by early October, several weeks after implementation gets underway.

But it did not clear up a dispute with Palestinians over the final phase of the Wye accord's three-step land handover, which Barak had sought to postpone by several months.

Palestinians said they would reject modifications to the accord being sought by Barak and would not start negotiations on a final peace treaty until Israel made all of its promised West Bank redeployments.

Barak told Israel Television he had agreed in meetings last month with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat

to put the stalled agreement back into action starting in September.

"We will implement Wye. We have a timetable. I said a month ago that in seven weeks — in other words three weeks from today — we will begin counting the days for implementation of Wye. Mubarak and I agreed to this then, Mubarak and Arafat agreed to it. That's how it will happen, exactly as planned," he said.

Last year's US-brokered Wye accord called for Israel to cede 13 per cent of the West Bank in three phases over 12 weeks in exchange for Palestinian security moves and other measures.

Barak, who took office last month pledging to breathe new life into a peace process that stalled under his right-wing predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu, has proposed folding the last stage of the land handover into talks on a permanent peace deal.

Palestinians said they had not been informed of a new timetable and would accept it only if all three redeployments

were made on schedule.

"We are still insisting on the immediate implementation of agreements without changing them and without combining interim issues with the negotiations," senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told Reuters.

A statement issued by the Palestinian cabinet after its weekly meeting on Friday said Palestinians would not enter "final status talks until the honest and complete implementation of interim agreements".

It said Palestinians still had the "natural right" to declare a Palestinian state unilaterally.

Netanyahu handed over two per cent of the West Bank after signing the Wye accord in October but suspended it weeks later.

The deal calls for Israel to hand over five per cent of the land in the second phase and six per cent in the third phase. Aides have said Barak asked Arafat to agree to delay the third redeployment to February.

## Pakistan will never accept LoC as international border: FM

ISLAMABAD, Aug 7: Pakistan will never entertain any proposal to convert the existing Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir into an international border, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said Saturday, according to reports, says AFP.

Neither Pakistan nor the people of Kashmir "will ever accept such a proposal," Aziz told The Nation daily.

He was commenting on remarks made by former Indian foreign secretary G.N. Dixit that India was ready to address the Kashmir issue if Pakistan recognised the realities on the ground.

Pakistan's media interpreted the comments, made by Dixit during a visit to Washington as special Indian emissary this month, as a broad hint that India was willing to consider conversion of the LoC into a formal border.

The LoC was delineated after a pact signed by Pakistan and India in 1972.

It divides the disputed Himalayan region between Pakistan and India, which have fought two wars over the ownership of the territory and were recently involved in a bitter two-month confrontation in the area.

Aziz said it must be kept in mind that Kashmir was not a territorial dispute but a question of self-determination of its 13 million people who had been agitating against Indian rule since 1989.

A solution based on the LoC being accepted as an international border would totally ignore the wishes of the people of Kashmir, he said.

He said the LoC was a temporary demarcation in a disputed territory, and that the Simla agreement called for respect of the LoC without prejudice to the known positions of the two countries on the Kashmir issue.

Pakistan insists on the implementation of a 1948-49

United Nations resolutions on Kashmir which envisaged a UN-sponsored referendum in the territory for its people to choose between union with either of the two countries.

The July 4 Pakistan-United States agreement that led to withdrawal of Islamic fighters by Islamabad from key peaks on the Indian side of the LoC underlined that both sides respect the LoC.

It called for the resumption of dialogue between the two South Asian rivals for resolving all issues dividing them, including Kashmir.

A Muslim separatist campaign in Indian-administered Kashmir has claimed more than 24,000 lives since 1989.

India accuses Pakistan of fuelling the unrest. Pakistan denies the charge but vows political and moral support for the campaign, calling it a legitimate indigenous struggle for self-determination.

## Army has nothing to fear from civilian rule: Suu Kyi

BANGKOK, Aug 7: Myanmar pro-democracy opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi called Saturday for national reconciliation on the eve of the 11th anniversary of a bloody student uprising, saying soldiers need not fear retribution from a civilian government, reports AFP.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who heads the National League for Democracy (NLD), urged the ruling army and the people "to work hand in hand to achieve democracy, where the people govern the country."

"There is no question that the people's government will honour the role of the Tatmadaw (military)," said a transcript of the message distributed by the Alternative Asian Network on Burma (ALTSEAN), which said it was broadcast on Burmese-language radio.

ALTSEAN is a southeast Asian network of academics, non-governmental organisations and dissidents. Burma is the former name for Myanmar.

"We also want the Tatmadaw to know what we are trying to do for our country. To achieve this understanding we need to have the freedom to communicate and discuss," she said.

Sunday is the anniversary of the country's August 8, 1988, or 8/8/88, uprising in which hundreds of pro-democracy demonstrators were gunned down and a junta took power from military dictator Ne Win.

The NLD under Aung San Suu Kyi won an easy victory in 1990 elections but the military refuses to recognise the result and keeps the Nobel laureate under constant military surveillance at her Yangon home.

Calls by the NLD and inter-

national pressure for a transition of power have been met with harsh crackdowns, with hundreds of opposition members detained.

The junta has repeatedly spurned calls for dialogue with the NLD if Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of independence hero General Aung San, takes part.

It also dismisses accusations from the international community that it harbours drug lords and condones human rights abuses such as forced labour and rape.

Saturday's transcript also included a message from NLD vice-chairman Tin Oo, who called for the military to downsize and stay out of national politics.

"The soldiers have to stay clear from party politics. Military men must work only as soldiers," he said.

## Assam rail track bombed

GUWAHATI, India, Aug 7: A major disaster was averted in India's far east when suspected militants exploded a landmine on a railway track minutes before a train with 1,000 people on board was about to cross, officials said, reports AFP.

Train services between the northeast and the rest of India were disrupted as the blast caused extensive damage to the line near Bijni, 260 kilometres west of Guwahati, in Assam.

The explosion took place as a "security train" was crossing the area. It was to be followed shortly afterwards by the North-East Express, which was bound for New Delhi.

A so-called security engine is usually run ahead of major passenger trains in India's northeastern region, where a dozen militant groups are active.

In this case the security pilot engine bore the brunt of the blast although the two drivers escaped with minor injuries, said Robin Kalita, Senior Area Manager of the North-East Frontier Railways.

"Had the blast occurred when the express train was crossing, it would have been a disaster," Kalita told AFP.

A police spokesman claimed Bodo tribal guerrillas were behind the explosion.

The police had earlier Saturday defused a similar landmine placed on another stretch of track in Assam's Nalbari district.



An Israeli soldier signals to Palestinian demonstrators to stop in the West Bank town of Hebron on Friday after sporadic clashes between Palestinian youths and Israeli forces broke out in this flashpoint town for the third day in a row. Hebron was sealed off by the Israeli army earlier in the week after a gun attack against two Jewish settlers. — AFP photo

## N Korea will 'never' give up right to launch missiles

GENEVA, Aug 7: Four-party Korean peace talks entered a third day Saturday, with diplomats reporting "glacial" progress at best, as fears of a North Korean missile launch continued to overshadow discussions, reports AFP.

The missile issue was not on the formal agenda of the talks, but largely dominates public comment, with a spokesman for Pyongyang's delegation saying North Korea would "never" give up its right to launch missiles.

"Our position is that we need missiles and when we get prepared for it, we will launch it," spokesman Pak Myung Guk told reporters before the third day of talks aimed at formally ending the 1950-53 Korean war.

"We will never change in that position," he said as he left his hotel for the conference centre where the talks are taking place.

The new round of Geneva

talks, between the two Koreas and their Cold War allies China and the United States, is the sixth session of negotiations aimed at ending the war since 1997.

North and South Korea never signed a formal peace treaty and are still technically at war.

The talks started last Thursday and were due to end Monday. But after two full days few signs of any advance were visible.

"The North Korean position has not changed," said South Korea's deputy delegation chief Song Min-Sun, although he admitted dialogue had started after the simple presentation of positions in the opening sessions.

But he said: "It's like a glacier moving. It's very slow."

The head of the North Korean delegation was even gloomier. "We are not expecting any progress," Deputy Foreign

Minister Kim Gye-Gwan told reporters late Friday.

"We are making every effort to reach an agreement. We are sincerely discussing with flexibility... but we have fundamental differences in positions," he said.

The Geneva talks, launched in December 1997, aim to reduce tension on the Korean peninsula and forge a formal peace treaty to replace the current armistice which has held the peace since 1953.

The talks have consistently failed to produce results following the outright rejection by the United States and its ally South Korea to discuss demands for a troop withdrawal and a bilateral peace pact.

US officials said before the start of the latest talks they hoped for "small concrete steps". Other diplomats talk about "keeping the channels of dialogue open". Few talk of anything more substantial.

## Russia orders crackdown after villages near Chechnya seized

MOSCOW, Aug 7: Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin on Saturday ordered security chiefs to restore order along Russia's troubled border with rebel Chechnya after suspected Islamic militants seized two Russian villages, reports says, reports AFP.

Chief of Staff General Anatoly Kvashnin and Interior Ministry forces chief Vyacheslav Ovkinnikov were told to take prompt steps to "normalise the situation on the Chechen-Dagestan border," a senior official said.

Stepashin ordered them to use "maximum efficiency" to resolve the situation, Alexander Mikhailov, head of the government information service, quoted the premier as saying, Interfax reported.

The prime minister, currently on tour in the Volga region east of Moscow, discussed the security situation with

Dagestan leader Magomedali Magomedov by telephone.

In Moscow, Chechnya's official representative Mayerbek Vachagayev said "the Chechen authorities do not finance (the insurgents) or have any sort of contact with them," ITAR-TASS reported.

Dagestan's Interior Minister Adigeriyev summoned officials to an emergency meeting to discuss the development, ministry spokesman Abdulkhanap Musayev told Echo Moscow radio.

Some 200-300 Islamic militants crossed from Chechnya around 7:00 a.m. (0300 GMT) to seize control of the villages of Ansalta and Rakhata, he said. Other reports put the number at 500.

The group was "digging trenches around the villages," he said, "but so far there has been no contact between the fighters

and the villagers or the police."

The security forces were currently assessing the size and strength of the armed group but had enough forces in the zone to contain the situation, Musayev said.

Interfax said a battalion of interior ministry troops and another from the defence ministry, comprising some 1,000 men, were on station in the troubled zone.

Dagestan and the entire northern Caucasus region has been in turmoil since the 21-month Chechen war of independence from Moscow erupted in December 1994.

The war ended in August 1996 with a ceasefire and a humiliating withdrawal by Russian forces, but left neighbouring republics in the region weak and prone to a wave of hostage-taking from crime gangs based in Chechnya.

## Clinton to attend APEC summit

US President Bill Clinton will travel to Auckland, New Zealand, in September to attend a meeting of leaders of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the White House announced on Friday, Reuters reports from Little Rock.

The September 12-13 summit will bring together the leaders of the 21 Asia-Pacific economies that comprise the group to discuss the region's economic outlook following a financial crisis that put many countries into recession.

**Army officer killed in Kashmir:** Muslim separatist guerillas Saturday ambushed and shot dead an Indian army officer in the strife-torn state of Kashmir, police said, AFP reports from Srinagar.

Colonel Balbir Singh died instantly in the attack near a military base in Kupwara district, nearly 100 kilometres north of here. Another soldier was wounded in the ambush.

**Minister's son sentenced to death:** The 34-year-old son of a Samoan cabinet minister was sentenced to death Friday after pleading guilty to the assassination of the country's Public Works Minister Luagalua Levaala Kamu, AFP reports from Apia.

Eletise Leafa Vitale was to have been in court for a routine remand but he appeared with a new lawyer and immediately pleaded guilty.

## Lankan maid beaten to death in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, Aug 7: A Kuwaiti couple have been detained following the torture and beating to death of their Sri Lankan maid, newspapers said Saturday, reports AFP.

The man and wife were held after a doctor called in to their flat in Kuwait City pronounced the domestic help dead and informed authorities, the English-language Arab Times said.

The man denied any knowledge of how the Sri Lankan died, but his wife broke down during interrogation and said he had tortured and beaten the maid until she fell to the ground.

Some 100,000 Sri Lankans working in Kuwait, mainly as domestic servants, earn a monthly wage of up to 50 dinars (165 dollars).

## Sierra Leone rebels agree to free hostages

LONDON, Aug 7: Sierra Leone rebels holding as many as 30 people hostage, in a bid to secure freedom for their leader, have agreed to release them, the west African country's Information Minister Julius Spencer told BBC radio on Saturday, reports AFP.

They have agreed to release them. My guess is that it is the modalities which are being worked out now," he said.

Five British Army officers and a number of Nigerian soldiers in the West African peace-keeping force ECOMOG as well as United Nations humanitarian workers and journalists are among the hostages who were snatched on Wednesday by rebels from the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council.

They are being held at Ocra Hills, around 40 kilometres (25 miles) east of Freetown.

Spencer did not specify the

## Brunei tightens laws on errant husbands

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Aug 7: Errant husbands in oil-rich Brunei who fail to maintain their wives and children can have their salaries taken away by law, and be fined and jailed under a new law, a report said today, reports AFP.

The wide-ranging legislation is specifically for non-Muslims in this conservative Islamic monarchy of more than 300,000 people ruled by Sultan Hassanalkhalid, who has two wives.

Family regulations for Muslims are covered by specific Islamic laws which include issues involving marriage and divorce.

According to the Berne Bulletin newspaper, the new law elevates the rights of non-Muslim women to a more equal footing with men.

The most important aspect of the "Emergency (Married Women) Order 1999," which came into effect on August 1, was maintenance of wives and children before or after separation.

Previously, for example, a man earning 7,000 Brunei dollars (4,142 US) could pay 200 dollars a month in maintenance. But not any more.

## Dead Sea may disappear in 25 years

AMMAN, Aug 7: The Dead Sea, the saltiest body of water on earth and world-renowned tourist resort, is shrinking at an alarming rate and might disappear in 20-25 years, Jordan Times reported today, reports Xinhua.

Landlocked in the Jordan Valley between Israel and Jordan, the Dead Sea has shrunk to around 50 kilometres in length from 80 kilometres three decades ago due to drought, pollution and over exploitation, the paper said.

Some 90 per cent of the Jordan river water, is now being diverted into Jordan and Israel after the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1994, and the river water's quality has deteriorated due to agricultural run-offs and increased salinity.

Water fountains around the sea are also dammed to gather water for agricultural purposes, while other fountains were polluted, Jordan Times said.

Industrial activities around the Dead Sea's banks also contributed to the problems, massive evaporation pools vaporise the sea's water to extract minerals and for manufacturing beauty products.

Environmental impacts on the Dead Sea also include air pollution caused by dust and fuel burning, and disposal of hazardous materials, experts said.

Due to these factors, the Dead Sea might disappear in 20-25 years, warned Dureid Mahasneh, former general secretary of the Jordan Valley Authority of the desert kingdom.

He said the Dead Sea's water level drops by 10 to 15 centimetres every year in modern history.

Each year, millions of tourists flock to its shores to float on its water, which contains high level of sulphur.

## 4.5 lakh registered for E Timor vote

DILI, East Timor, Aug 7: Close to 450,000 people have registered to take part in the landmark vote on East Timor's future on August 30, a United Nations official said Saturday.

"Preliminary figures show that 433,576 individuals registered within East Timor and 12,680 outside, bringing the total to 446,256 registrants," the chief electoral officer of the UN Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), Jeff Fischer, said.

The voters were registered between July 16 and August 6 in 200 UNAMET centres across the territory and several others in selected towns in Indonesia and abroad where large exiled East

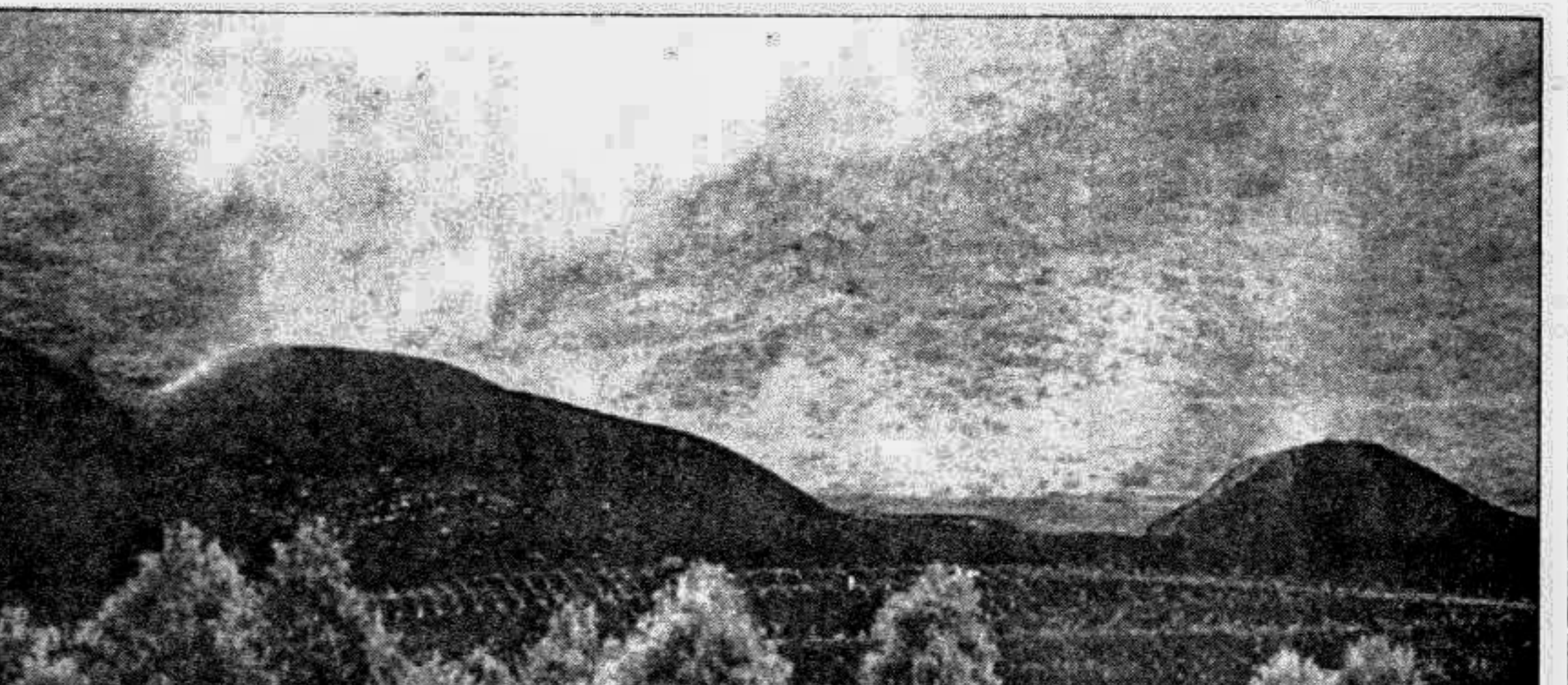
Timorese communities exist.

East Timorese will vote whether to accept an offer of autonomy within Indonesia, which invaded the former Portuguese colony in 1975, and annexed it a year later.

Jakarta has said it may give the territory independence if the autonomy offer is rejected.

Fischer said a total of 913 registration applications had been refused, 13 of which were at registration stations abroad.

Indonesia and Portugal, in an agreement at the United Nations in New York on May 5, agreed to allow the United Nations to conduct a "popular consultation" in East Timor.



Lava and ashes erupt from two new craters on top of the Cerro Negro volcano, 90 Km from Managua, Nicaragua, on August 5, as it starts to show activities after being dormant for four years. About 1,000 residents from the nearby communities have been evacuated as a precautionary measure as local experts do not expect the volcano's activity to increase. — AFP photo