

Yeltsin pledges to resolve crisis in Dagestan

MOSCOW, Aug 12: President Boris Yeltsin said today the military were involved in "serious work" in Dagestan, the southern Russian republic that was invaded from Chechnya last weekend, and the crisis would be resolved "gradually, without haste," reports AFP.

"Serious work is being done," the agency quoted Yeltsin as saying. In his first comments since the crisis began on Saturday, "We will solve this problem gradually, without haste."

Yeltsin, 68, had been in seclusion since the latest conflict to shake the volatile northern Caucasus erupted.

Some 1,200 insurgents from Chechnya invaded parts of Dagestan and proclaimed the republic independent from Russia. At least 11 Russian soldiers have been killed.

It is the most serious fighting in the region since the 1994-96 Chechen war, in which Moscow fought to prevent Chechnya from bolting from the Russian Federation.

Saddam's threats destroyed ties, alleges Iran

TEHRAN, Aug 12: Iran said today that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's threats of force against the Islamic republic had "destroyed everything" and harmed normalisation of ties between the two nations, reports AFP.

"His surprising and unpredictable words have destroyed everything and set back the process of normalisation," Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi said as Baghdad and Tehran stepped up their war of words following a provocative speech by Saddam on Sunday.

"Unfortunately, our location on the globe makes us neighbours with Iraq and Afghanistan. But I suppose we have to make do," he said on state radio. He accused Iraq of "procrastinating" in the exchange of POWs and demanded that Baghdad provide "clear answers" to resolve one of the thorniest issues dividing the two more than a decade after the end of their 1980-1988 war.

Iraq and Iran have bitterly accused each other of causing the breakdown in last month's POW talks in Baghdad after Saddam on Sunday threatened to use force against Iran to resolve outstanding issues from the war.

Exiled activists accuse Myanmar junta of fresh crackdown

BANGKOK, Aug 12: Exiled activists accused Myanmar's junta today of a fresh crackdown on dissent for fear of a student uprising similar to that experienced in 1988, reports AFP.

The Thailand-based National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), an umbrella group of exiled activists and politicians, said some 44 people in Bago, north of Yangon, had been detained recently.

Four activists aged 18-23 were arrested on August 2 and were being held by military intelligence in Bago town, an NCUB statement said.

It said 40 others in the Bago area were detained earlier, including representatives of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

The crackdown seems to be a result of the fear of the military of a repetition of the countrywide demonstrations in 1988 that brought about the downfall of former dictator General Ne Win.

Junta officials could not immediately be contacted to confirm the report.

Last Sunday marked the 11th anniversary of the popular uprising in the military-ruled country on August 8, 1988, in which hundreds of democracy demonstrators were gunned down and a junta took power from Ne Win.

US scientists find virus linked with breast cancer

SYDNEY, Aug 12: US scientists have discovered evidence of a virus linked to human breast cancer which they say could lead to the development of a vaccine for the disease, reports Reuters.

The virus, almost identical to one causing breast cancer in laboratory mice, was found in more than 85 per cent of women with breast cancer. Robert Garry of Tulane University told an international virology conference in Sydney this week.

The human mammary tumor virus, which Garry said was hereditary and non-infectious, was also discovered in 20 per cent of people without breast cancer.

"If the virus has the same role in human breast cancer as in mouse breast cancer then this is a very significant step in fighting the disease," Garry told Reuters today.

"Finding a vaccine shouldn't be that difficult," he said.

Breast cancer specialists were sceptical, saying the link between a virus and diseases was not necessarily causal.

Fifty per cent of women who have breast cancer might also have brown hair, that doesn't mean brown hair causes cancer," John Boyages, director of the New South Wales Breast Cancer Institute, told Reuters.

UN calls for talks to settle disputes

Pakistan sending reinforcements to southern border with India

ISLAMABAD, Aug 12: Pakistan was sending reinforcements to its southern border with India today after a second day of aerial clashes that prompted the US to declare the nuclear neighbours were "going in the wrong direction," reports AFP.

Pakistani military leaders said they were sending troops, paramilitary rangers and marines to join commandos in the area, where Wednesday they fired at least one missile at Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft and Tuesday a Pakistani surveillance airplane was shot down, killing 16.

Indian officials said one surface-to-air missile was fired at one of three helicopters carrying Delhi-based journalists to view the wreckage of the downed Pakistani aircraft. No one was injured in the incident.

Pakistani military spokesman Brigadier Rashid Qureshi spoke of "missiles" being fired but stressed they were targeted at two jet fighters escorting the helicopters, which he said intruded into Pakistani airspace.

The day before, Indian MiG-21 fighters shot down a Pak-

istian naval aircraft saying it was spying, had violated Indian airspace and ignored demands to land.

Pakistan claimed the plane was on a training mission and shot down in its own airspace.

Two days of clashes further raised tensions between the two South Asian rivals, just one month after the end of 10 weeks of bitter fighting along their disputed border in Kashmir.

The United States, France and the United Nations all expressed concern and urged India and Pakistan, who conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests in May

down, to resume their stalled peace dialogue.

US State Department spokesman James Rubin said: "It's hard to be optimistic at this stage. If anything, today's events are an indication that we're going in the wrong direction."

AP adds from UN: The UN Security Council on Wednesday backed Secretary-General Kofi Annan's call for talks between India and Pakistan to settle their differences peacefully.

India shot down a Pakistani military plane Tuesday, killing 16 people, and Pakistan fired a surface-to-air missile Wednesday at Indian aircraft heading to the border region.

Annan urged both countries to avoid "tit-for-tat" incidents that could lead to spiraling violence. UN spokesman Fred Eckhard said Wednesday.

"He continues to look forward to the resumption of the bilateral dialogue between these two countries," Eckhard said.

On Tuesday, Annan urged India and Pakistan to exercise "maximum restraint" and expressed concern at escalating tensions in the region.

India's charge d'affaires at the United Nations relayed his country's views on Tuesday's incident to a senior UN official.

Pakistan's new UN ambassador, Inamul Haque, delivered a letter from his government to Annan when he presented his credentials on Tuesday.

Both incidents were raised Wednesday at the Security Council, which did not issue a statement.

Namibia's UN Ambassador Martin Andjaba, the current council president, however, said council members "took note" of Annan's statement and encourage both India and Pakistan to settle the problem through bilateral consultations.

He said "no further steps are being considered" by the council.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (R) offers prayers along with Pakistan Naval Chief Fasih Bukhari (L) and other senior naval and military officers for the 16 naval personnel at Mehran base in the port city of Karachi yesterday. Six officers and ten sailors were killed when Indian fighter jets fired a missile on a Pakistani patrol aircraft on Tuesday.

— AFP photo

ROK slams Kazakhstan over alleged sale of MiG-21 to DPRK

SEOUL, Aug 12: South Korea has strongly protested to Kazakhstan's alleged sale of MiG-21 fighter jets to communist North Korea, the foreign ministry said today, reports AFP.

Foreign Minister Hong Soon-Young summoned Kazakhstan's ambassador here to lodge the complaint against the alleged multi-billion dollar deal, officials said.

The minister conveyed his regret that Kazakhstan shipped the MiG fighters to North Korea and asked the Kazakh government to prevent the recurrence of such incidents, an official said.

Ambassador Tulegen Zhueyev replied that his government had fired Defence Minister Altay Bayev and National Security Council chairman Nurlat Abykayev in connection with shipments of jets to foreign countries, the official added.

The North Korean government has strongly protested to Kazakhstan's alleged sale of MiG-21 fighter jets to communist North Korea, the foreign ministry said today, reports AFP.

The move came a day after the United States voiced serious concerns about reports that Kazakhstan had exported a consignment of MiG-21 fighter jets to North Korea.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service chief Chun Yong-Taek said late Wednesday that the former Soviet state in central Asia had sold 34 second-hand jets to starving Pyongyang for a price of 40 million dollars each.

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Rubin did not say how many MiGs the United States believed to be involved but South Korean officials said the Stalinist North had obtained 40 planes.

"We have serious concerns about transfers of this kind and we continue to monitor this case very, very closely," US State Department spokesman James Rubin said Wednesday.

Rubin did not say how many MiGs the United States believed to be involved but South Korean officials said the Stalinist North had obtained 40 planes.

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