

## 120 held to stop uprising in Myanmar

BANGKOK, Aug 14: An opposition group of exiled Myanmar students claimed Saturday that the country's military regime has taken 120 people into custody over the past two weeks to thwart a revolt that dissidents have called for Sept 9.

The All Burma Students' Democratic Front, composed of students who fled Myanmar after an uprising 11 years ago was crushed in bloodshed, also claimed that a virtual curfew had been imposed in Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, and other places since last week.

The claims came a day after Myanmar's government announced that it had foiled an alleged plot by the students, ethnic rebels, drug traffickers and the party led by Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi to instigate a mass uprising next month.

The government claimed that four people, including two ABSDF leaders and two mid-ranking members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, had been arrested. It said any one engaged in the plot was subject to "severe punishment."

Opposition groups have been urging a new uprising for Sept 9, 1999 — or 9-9-99 — and claim the date is auspicious. Many people in Myanmar, also known as Burma, take numerology very seriously, though nine is usually associated with former military strongman Ne Win.

There was no immediate government comment on the ABSDF's claims. A week ago, exiles marked the 11th anniversary of the beginning of the last uprising — Aug 8, 1988, or 8-8-88. But Myanmar was quiet, as it was last year on the 10th anniversary.

Meanwhile, the government said that two people who had helped arrange peace deals with breakaway factions of an ethnic rebel group, the Karenni National Progressive Party, had been ambushed, tortured and killed by KNPP loyalists July 31.

The pair, identified as Phrae Moe, 56, and Hla Din, 57, were said in a press statement to have been instrumental in persuading 100 KNPP members to reach a peace settlement with the government last month.

## EU concerned at conflict in Dagestan

HELSINKI, Aug 14: The European Union (EU) expressed its deep concern on Friday over the conflict in Russia's southern province of Dagestan, fearing a further escalation of the fighting, reports Xinhua.

In a presidential statement released here, the EU condemned the seizure of several villages by the armed rebel groups and the rebels' proclamation of an independent Islamic State of Dagestan.

The EU reaffirmed its support for the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, calling upon the Russian authorities to "use proportionate force" to restore order in Dagestan, which has "already been deeply affected by a poor socio-economic situation."

Fighting between the Islamic militants and Russia's federal forces erupted on August 7 in this mountainous, multi-ethnic republic in Russia's North Caucasus region.

The EU meanwhile expressed worries about the fate of civilians in the region and that of a considerable number of refugees fleeing the area, urging the conflicting sides to respect universal human rights and humanitarian law.

## Suharto hospitalised again

JAKARTA, Aug 14: Former President Suharto has been admitted to a Jakarta hospital with a stomach illness less than a month after he suffered a stroke, one of his lawyers said Saturday, reports AFP.

A lawyer Syamsul Hadi said Suharto, 78, was admitted to the Pertamina Hospital on Friday night.

"He complained of a stomach problem last night and was taken to the hospital. The doctors are looking after him. So far as I know he is okay. But I don't know enough to be specific," Hadi said.

Hospital workers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Suharto was examined at its intensive care unit for about one hour and half on Saturday morning.

He was then taken to a private room on trolley wearing an oxygen mask.

No further details were immediately available. Three of Suharto's six multimillionaire children were at the hospital Saturday.

Suharto, who is fending off allegations of massive corruption during his 32-year iron-fisted reign, suffered what doctors and family said was a mild stroke on July 20. It reduced some of his body movement and slurred his speech.

He discharged himself 10 days later and had been recuperating at his central Jakarta home, which is equipped with a private clinic.

Suharto came to power in 1966 one year after his troops crushed what he claimed was a communist coup attempt against founding President Sukarno, who died under house arrest in 1970.

## Delhi rejects Washington's contention

# Sharif warns India against 'atrocities' on Kashmiri Muslims

ISLAMABAD, Aug 14: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif warned India on Saturday against what he called its atrocities on Muslims of the disputed Kashmir region, saying this protracted problem threatened peace, reports AP.

"Indian forces are killing innocent Kashmiris. We cannot remain silent on the Indian atrocities," Sharif said in a speech to mark the 52nd Independence Day of Pakistan.

Pakistan, carved out of British India on Aug 14 1947, was at the brink of a war with its rival neighbour when Indian forces were battling the Muslim militants who captured mountain heights in Kashmir's Kargil area in May.

But the threat of a full-scale war between the two nuclear powers was averted following international pressure that forced Pakistan to appeal to the militants to vacate their positions in July.

"We made an appeal to the mujahedeen (holy warriors) to withdraw to ease tension," Sharif said.

But on Tuesday India fighter planes shot down an unarmed navy plane without any provocation, he said.

Pakistan acted with responsibility and showed restraint, he said. "But there is a limit to our patience," he warned.

The incident "exposes who wants peace and who doesn't," he added.

Islamabad says India shot down the Pakistani plane when it was on a training flight well within its airspace, killing 16 servicemen.

India says the Pakistani plane violated its airspace. Pakistan and India have already fought two wars over Kashmir — a former princely state, now divided between them. Both the countries claim Kashmir in its entirety.

A third war was fought over Bangladesh which was then former East Pakistan.

Sharif said Pakistan tried to ease tension with India "but it was thrust upon us; we will give a befitting reply," he said, adding that the threat of a war could only be removed after the

solution of Kashmir dispute. Sharif also paid tributes to the soldiers killed in fighting against India on the Kashmir border during recent tension, saying that they wrote "history with golden letters."

"I pay tributes to soldiers and officers who were martyred. I also salute the mujahedeen for their sacrifices. Their blood will not be wasted," he said.

Muslim guerrillas have been waging a bloody war against Indian rule in Kashmir for the last decade for its independence or merger with Islamic Pakistan.

India accuses Pakistan sending intruders, including soldiers, in Kashmir. Pakistan denies the charge and says it gives only political and moral support to the Kashmiris.

Xinhua adds from New Delhi: India Friday rejected the United States contention that New Delhi had not respected the agreement signed with Pakistan in 1991 on the prevention of airspace violations.

A spokesman of the External

Affairs Ministry claimed that the Pakistani military aircraft was shot down in Kutch area of the western Gujarat state under standard operating procedures after it failed to comply with all warnings and signals.

The reaction came in response to official comments from Washington that India had not respected the agreement by shooting down the Pakistani plane and that the incident had taken place at a "highly disputed" area.

Citing article two of the agreement that "combat aircraft will not fly within 10 kilometers of each other's airspace," the spokesman said that "the Pakistani aircraft fell well within the rubric of this clause."

He claimed that Pakistani intrusion had taken place in four parts of the border area with the first three intrusions taking place at the border which had been delineated and clearly demarcated and the last intruding deep into Indian airspace.

## All pregnant women in UK need to have HIV test

LONDON, Aug 14: All pregnant women in England are to be offered HIV test in an effort to reduce the rising number of babies born with the deadly virus, reports Xinhua.

The tests are to be recommended to women as part of their routine ante-natal screening, but there will be no element of compulsion, according to local media reports.

The measures, announced on Friday by Health Minister Teresa Jewell, are designed to cut by 80 per cent the number of babies born HIV positive by the year 2002. They are also aimed at improving treatment for women with HIV.

Women know to be HIV positive can take anti-viral drugs during pregnancy to minimize the risk of transmitting the disease to their babies during birth. At the moment, two-thirds of the women who are HIV positive do not know they are infected.

The UK has one of Europe's highest maternal HIV transmission rates.

## Fresh violence on Independence Day Militants kill 5 Indian soldiers in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 14: Five Indian soldiers were killed and 16 others injured in two separate attacks by suspected Muslim militants today, the eve of Independence Day, police said, reports AFP.

A police spokesman said militants first fired rockets and later opened fire at an army camp at Manasbal village, 35 kilometers (21 miles) from Srinagar, killing three soldiers at about 2:00 am (2030 GMT Friday). "Four of the nine injured are in a critical condition," the spokesman said.

In another attack in northern Kupwara district bordering Pakistan, Muslim militants ambushed an army patrol, killing two soldiers and injuring seven early today, the spokesman said. He said Indian security forces also defused a bomb concealed in a gas cylinder in the downtown Srinagar district. The attacks were the latest in a campaign of assaults on military facilities in the disputed Kashmir region. Two soldiers were killed yesterday

in a similar attack Beerwah in central Kashmir.

More than 80 militants, security personnel and civilians have been killed in a sudden rise in violence in Kashmir this month. Muslim separatists traditionally step up operations before Independence Day on August 15 but this time they have engaged in particularly daring attacks on army and paramilitary encampments.

India says the campaign has been masterminded by the Pakistani intelligence services before the recent two-month conflict along the disputed border between India and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

Islamabad denies the charge, although it extends diplomatic and moral support to the Muslim insurgency in Indian Kashmir, which has claimed more than 24,000 lives in the past 10 years. Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, has been the cause of two of the three wars between the world's two newest nuclear powers.

## Clinton, Barak discuss ME peace moves over telephone

WASHINGTON, Aug 14: President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak discussed Middle East peace efforts during a 15-minute telephone call on Friday, the White House said, reports Reuters.

They touched on Israel's talks with the Palestinians and on the possibility of its resuming negotiations with Syria in the conversation, their second this week. National Security Council spokesman David Leavy said.

Israel has said that it is ready to resume peace talks with Syria, suspended in 1996, and its foreign minister said on Tuesday that he hoped there would be a breakthrough soon. They talked about the status of the Middle East peace process, both the Palestinian and Syrian tracks, Leavy said, saying they also spoke about how to make Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's upcoming visit to the region a success.

Barak has sought to breathe new life into the Middle East peace process since taking office last month, and he has said he wants the United States to take a less direct role in the peace talks than under his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Albright postponed her trip by two weeks, until late August or early September, at Barak's request to give him more time to iron out his problems with the Palestinians over carrying out last year's Wye River land-for-security agreement.

## Colombian rebels kill 6 civilians

BOGOTA, Aug 14: A rightwing paramilitary group killed at least six civilians in northeastern Colombia and took 70 people hostage as a shield against leftist rebels who drove them out of the town of San Carlos, regional authorities said Friday, reports AFP.

Police and army forces left San Carlos in Antioquia province on Sunday.

A large group of men from the right-wing Self-defense Units of Colombia (AUC) entered San Carlos Thursday afternoon and took dozens of people to "check if any of them were guerrilla sympathizers," a city official told AFP by telephone.

The AUC forces then killed five men and one woman before rebels apparently from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) forced them out of the city Friday morning.

Paramilitary troops took 70 people hostage, the city official said, adding that FARC and AUC forces continued a clash in the outskirts of town-sometimes near the country's major hydroelectric plants.

Some hostages were loaded into trucks before the paramilitaries fled down paved highways, according to a reporter in the area for Caracol radio.

## Ambon violence claims 10 more

JAKARTA, Aug 14: A further 10 people have been killed in Ambon, police said today as the situation in the riot-torn east Indonesian city remained tense, reports AFP.

Ambon was "still tense as can be expected, but we have had no report of violence today," Maluku province Police spokesman, Major Philip Jekriel said. The 10 were killed in last night's violence. "That is the number of deaths we have checked at the hospital," Jekriel said.

But the Media Indonesia daily said 12 people were killed and at least 10 injured in violence between Christians and Muslims in the Gunung Malintang of South Ambon on late yesterday. The head of the police operational command centre, Captain Martien Johanis was quoted as saying violence had also erupted yesterday in two other residential areas of Ambon — Aspara Hative Keil and Kampung Kolom — with Christians attacking and burning the homes of Muslims.

Ambon has been torn since late last month by a fresh outbreak of violent Christian-Muslim clashes that have now left more than 100 dead and over 400 seriously injured.



A group of young East Timorese women read a leaflet promoting autonomy under Indonesia distributed during a pro-Indonesian rally in the East Timorese capital of Dili yesterday. Supporters cheered on campaigners during the rally who were promoting the merits of autonomy under Indonesian rule, on first day of a two-week campaign ahead of a landmark August 30 vote of self-determination for East Timor. —AFP photo

## BRIEFLY

### Mother, son killed in Assam blast

The wife and minor son of a homeopath were killed while the practitioner himself was injured when a bomb exploded at their house in Assam's Darrang district on Friday, official sources said. FTI reports from Gauhati.

The bomb went off at the house of homeopath Ratna Mushahary at Lailanpara under Dalgan police station of the district, the sources said. Mushahary's wife and child died on the spot, while he was injured seriously, they said.

**Turkey raises retirement age:** Turkey's parliament adopted a bill raising the retirement age from 55 to 60 for men and from 50 to 58 for women, the Anatolia news agency reported on Saturday, reports AFP from Ankara.

The controversial retirement bill, centerpiece of a reform of the social security system, was passed by parliament at around midnight yesterday, with 239 deputies voting in favour and 42 opposed. Dozens of opposition deputies walked out of the session in protest.

**Violence flares up in Belfast:** Police clashed with protesters attempting to block the route of a Protestant parade in Belfast early Saturday and more than 20 people were injured at the start of a day of controversial marches in the province, reports AFP from Belfast.

Nineteen police officers and several protesters were injured when helmeted riot police wielding batons moved in to remove a sit-down demonstration on the Ormeau Road, site of one of three parades by hardline Protestants in the province Saturday. At least two people were taken to hospitals for treatment.

## US trying to convince Taliban on Laden's trial in Egypt

WASHINGTON, Aug 14: The United States is negotiating with Afghanistan's hard-line Islamic Taliban on sending alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden to stand trial in a third country, NBC News reported on its website today, reports AFP.

Quoting a senior US official, NBC said Washington hoped to convince the Taliban to send bin Laden to either Egypt or Saudi Arabia to answer charges that he masterminded the bombings of two US embassies in Africa a year ago. Abdul Haqueem Mujahid, the Taliban's UN representative, told NBC News the United States had asked that bin Laden be deported.

"If Osama bin Laden himself wants to go to any other country, we will support the idea and even facilitate his departure to any other country," Mujahid said.

But if bin Laden were to leave the shelter of the Taliban, which controls 80 per cent of Afghanistan, it is unlikely he would go to Egypt — where he has been linked to a plot to kill President Hosni Mubarak — or Saudi Arabia — where he is suspected of involvement in a bomb attack that killed five US servicemen, reported NBC.

The United States has posted a five-million dollar reward for information leading to the arrest of bin Laden, accusing him of being behind the twin bomb-

## Amnesty Int'l draws up new plans

TROIA, Portugal, Aug 14: Amnesty International's top policy-making body began on Friday mapping out a strategy to battle mass human rights violations that have dogged the final years of the 20th century, reports Reuters.

The world is in danger of entering the 21st century "moving in reverse" on human rights, Amnesty's Secretary-General Pierre Sané said in a welcoming address to the group's international Council.

"Genocide and massive rights violations...are once again on our lips. Wars, with their accompanying atrocities and convoys of refugees constitute a daily return to barbarity," Sané said.

The International Council, which has drawn some 500 delegates from all over the world, meets every two years to debate policy and set priorities.

Officials said that a top concern at the week-long, closed-door sessions would be to how to drive home to governments the message that there could no longer be any impunity for rights' abusers.

## ROK students' rally for merger with DPRK

SEOUL, Aug 14: Police cordoned off a Seoul campus where 3,000 leftist students held an outlawed rally Saturday to call for unification of South and North Korea, reports AP.

After resting in the shade, students gathered in the late afternoon to kick off their annual pro-unification rally in Seoul National University with calls to end Seoul's anti-communist national security law and US military presence.

## 80 Liberian hostages freed

DAKAR, Aug 14: Eighty hostages kidnapped in Liberia by unidentified gunmen arrived late Friday at Daro in Guinea on the Liberian border, an official said in Conakry, reports AFP.

Guinean Security Minister Sekou Goureyssy Conde told that the freed hostages were three Britons, one Italian, a Norwegian, a Cote d'Ivoire national and 74 Liberians who worked for humanitarian organisations and the United Nations in Liberia.

In London, Foreign Office Minister Geoff Hoon said four Britons had been released.

Conde told AFP that the 80 had been sent over the border with the help of French-Belgian charity Medecins Sans Frontieres and the UN refugees agency from the Liberian town of Voinjama, "under the total control of the dissidents of the Liberian rebel factions."

## Russia raises prospect of wider war in Caucasus Mountains

MARKHACHKALA, Russia, Aug 14: Russian helicopter gunships kept up attacks on Islamic guerrillas in the Caucasus Mountains on Saturday, while Russian newspapers suggested the federal forces were gearing up for protracted, large-scale combat, reports AP.

Four Russian servicemen were killed overnight in scattered skirmishes with the militants in the mountainous republic of Dagestan, which neighbours breakaway Chechnya, the Interfax news agency said, the Interior Ministry as saying.

Rebel casualties were unclear. A Dagestan government spokesman said Russian warplanes and helicopters targeted villages in the Botlikh region of Dagestan overnight into Saturday morning.

Russia's acting Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Friday the campaign might be carried out in Chechnya, which fought a war of secession against Russia from 1994-96. It was the strongest indication yet that the uprising in Dagestan could

lead to a wider war.

Russia has been sending reinforcements to the region for a week, and the daily Novye Izvestia reported Saturday that the content of the contingents — including elite riot troops and engineering brigades — signalled that Moscow is preparing for extended fighting.

The business daily Kommersant said that the tasks assigned to the Russian forces suggested they could expand their crackdown to Chechnya and the neighboring region of Karachayevo-Cherkessia, which has seen weeks of public unrest over a contested election.

On Friday, Putin said, "Chechnya — this is the territory of Russia, and we will strike at militants wherever they are located."

Russian troops have been trying to dislodge the rebels since they seized several villages in Dagestan last Saturday. Many infiltrated from inside Chechnya.

The fighting is the biggest challenge to Russian authority since its war with Chechnya,

which has had effective independence since Russian troops pulled out three years ago.

Many of the rebels belong to the fundamentalist Wahhabi sect and are seeking an independent Islamic republic in the mostly Muslim regions of the Caucasus Mountains.

Russia is planning a large-scale operation in Dagestan on Sunday, said Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov, commander-in-chief of the Russian Interior Ministry troops.

The Dagestan government spokesman said Saturday that the heaviest ground fighting overnight was in the villages of Gagati and Rikvani in the Botlikh district.

Five airplanes arrived in the Dagestan capital of Makhachkala Friday carrying soldiers, weapons and medical equipment.

It was unclear how many federal troops were involved in the fighting, though Kommersant said thousands arrived on Friday alone. The rebels' numbers were estimated at up to 1,000.



Friends and relatives of Colombian journalist Jaime Garzon look at the car on Friday in which he was shot to death earlier in the day by unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle in Bogota. No guerrilla movement has claimed responsibility for the assassination so far. — AFP photo

## Two opinion polls survey reveal Vajpayee set for a big win

NEW DELHI, Aug 14: Riding on the success in swiftly evicting Pakistan-backed Islamic guerrillas from India-controlled Kashmir, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's rightist alliance appears to be heading for a big victory in next month's general elections, said two opinion polls published Saturday, reports AP.

Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party-led Hindu nationalists alliance is expected to get 44 per cent of the votes, giving it an es-

timated 332 of 545 seats in the Lok Sabha, the powerful lower house of parliament, said the poll conducted by The Times of India newspaper.

The main challenger, the Congress party and its allies, is expected to win 138 seats, the newspaper said.

Vajpayee's 13-month-old government lost a confidence vote in parliament in April, and President KR Narayanan ordered fresh general elections, third in as many years.