

International

Canada may hike immigration quota to 500,000

TORONTO, Aug 18: The Canadian government is proposing to increase the annual immigration quota to 500,000 from the current level of 225,000, with a government minister admitting that immigrants made an "enormous contribution" to the nation's economic growth, reports IANS.

According to a report in the Toronto Star, the plan to increase the immigration quota is the result of shortage of labour in many parts of the country, including Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan provinces.

In the past two years, the Immigration Department reportedly let in 50,000 immigrants less than the 225,000 ceiling. Elinor Kaplan, the new Citizenship Minister, is seen to have greater sensitivity towards immigrants than her predecessor Lucienne Robillard. She conceded she is thinking of increasing the immigration quota. Getting to a goal of 500,000 immigrants annually "is an important discussion" that the ruling Liberal Party members will hold behind closed doors in their meeting in Halifax this week, she said.

"We know that immigrants who come to Canada make an enormous contribution to our economic growth," Kaplan was quoted as saying. "We've had tremendous success in our immigrant communities among

new Canadians and they have created not only a success for themselves but for all of Canada," she said.

There is also a cause for alarm. The number of skilled workers leaving Canada for the U.S. has increased dramatically: from 17,000 in 1986 to 98,000 in 1997. Between 1995 and 1997, 69 per cent of computer graduates in this country went to the United States and 52 per cent of all engineering graduates went south of the border because of higher pay and other benefits.

Kaplan reportedly said she has already asked her department to develop new strategies to increase the annual immigration quota and that it needs to streamline the process to speed up the clearance of immigration applications. "We need to make sure that we have the people here for the jobs that are being created today and will be created in the future," she stated, adding that all Liberal Party Members of Parliament "understand the importance of bringing people here that want to build this country."

"They know and I know that it brings prosperity. New immigrants create jobs, new immigrants bring their talents, their expertise, their creativity and ingenuity and their knowledge of the world," she said.

World rallies to help Turkey

IZMIT, Turkey, Aug 18: The world rallied today to help Turkey, ravaged by an earthquake that killed at least 2,000 people, buried hundreds more and set the country's biggest oil refinery aflame, reports Reuters.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan pledged all possible UN help while many countries, even Turkey's traditional rival Greece, dispatched or promised expert rescue teams, medical aid and money.

Crisis centre officials in Ankara told Reuters that the death toll stood at 2,033 at 2300 GMT on Tuesday as rescuers made desperate efforts to find survivors of the quake which hit the country's most populous region.

Turkey declared its quake-devastated northwest a disaster area late on Tuesday, enabling the government to commandeer private and public resources to provide help.

Turkey's chief earthquake expert, Professor Ahmet Mete Isikara of Istanbul's Kandilli observatory, revised his rating of the quake to above 7 on the Richter Scale from a previous measurement of 6.7.

The US Geological Survey put the size of the earthquake, which was followed by some 300 aftershocks, at 7.8 on the Richter Scale. It called the quake one of the world's most

powerful in two decades.

The death toll rose by the hour but officials declined to say how high it would go. Hundreds were feared buried in rubble.

The quake struck at 3:02 am (0002 GMT) on Tuesday, killing many in their sleep.

Hours later, thousands fearing their homes would collapse bedded down under the stars in Istanbul, Turkey's commercial centre, as well as Izmit, the industrial city which bore the brunt of Tuesday's pre-dawn quake 90-km (55 miles) to the east.

Others rendered homeless had no choice but to sleep outdoors. The force of the quake ripped out electric pylons and power cables apart, leaving parts of the region without electricity.

It also toppled the minarets of dozens of mosques in the mostly Muslim country. There were no immediate reports of damage to Istanbul's architectural treasures such as the Blue Mosque.

In Izmit, rescue teams struggled to reach residents buried under dozens of collapsed buildings.

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit held out hope survivors would be found.

The quake turned an Izmit cemetery into an assembly line. Workmen operating bulldozers

dug rows of trenches on a hilltop to take the overflow from an overcrowded cemetery below.

"The bulldozers will keep digging until we have room for everyone," said Yesil Cakir, overseeing the grim task.

Outside an Izmit hospital, some 150 doctors and nurses struggled to save the wounded strewn among the dead.

The United States rushed a 70-member search-and-rescue team to the disaster area. Israel, which counts Turkey as its strongest regional ally, said it was answering Ankara's call for survivor-seeking sniffer dogs.

Swiss rescuers led by three golden Labradors were among the first foreign teams to search the rubble. Germany home to the largest Turkish population outside Turkey, sent salvage teams with dogs also.

The epicentre was near Izmit, where an uncontrollable fire at Turkey's biggest oil refinery prompted fears of an explosion. The Tupras refinery in Izmit said it evacuated all employees and rescue teams broke off their efforts overnight.

In nearby Golcuk, Turkish rescue teams dug at the ruins of a naval base building in search of some 200 buried sailors. Some 20 bodies were recovered. A guard said he and his comrades struggled to big them out with their bare hands.



Residents of Ada Pazara, the epicenter of the earthquake, drag the body of a man who was killed when his multi-story building collapsed during the 6.8 earthquake in western Turkey, Tuesday. The earthquake, one of the worst in recent Turkish history, has so far killed some 3,000 people with the death toll certain to rise, and thousands injured, as rescue teams scramble to find survivors, and those buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings.

— AFP photo

'Pakistan can build neutron bomb'

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: Pakistan has the capacity and expertise to build a neutron bomb, a prominent Pakistani nuclear scientist said Wednesday, following the disclosure by rival neighbour India that could also make the devices, reports AFP.

The country by the grace of God has such well-trained, specialised and capable nuclear scientists who can design and build a nuclear weapon of any type or size including a neutron bomb," N.M. Butt said.

The scientist, speaking on a television programme, said sufficient quantities of material used for making neutron bombs were also available within the country.

Neutron bombs are designed to maximize neutron radiation. They are lethal to all forms of life but, having a reduced blast, leave buildings and infrastructure relatively undamaged.

In the bomb the neutron-producing fusion process domi-

nates over the fission trigger. Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in May last year in prompt reaction to atomic detonations by India. The tests triggered international alarm and sanctions as well as calls for restraint by the two countries.

Indian Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) chairman Rajagopal Chidambaram said Monday that after the nuclear tests India could design and make nuclear weapons of "any type or size."

"It is not difficult to build such a device," Chidambaram said of India's capacity to build a neutron bomb.

India exploded a hydrogen bomb and four fission devices during its tests last year.

Despite declaring a moratorium on further tests, India has not halted its nuclear weapons research, according to top officials of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, which designed and built the devices.

Indian political parties converge on economic philosophy

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: A convergence in the economic philosophies of India's major political parties is fuelling hopes that start-stop reforms may finally move onto the fast track, analysts said Wednesday.

The alliance led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party and the main opposition Congress party both unveiled their election manifestos this week, showing a striking similarity of approach to the economy.

"It is hard to distinguish who is the originator of these policies. They look very similar," Kaushik said, adding that any consensus was welcome as the country begins to emerge from a three-year economic slowdown.

"Whoever comes to power, one thing is certain. We can definitely see more reforms at a faster pace," he said.

India's economic reforms, launched by the Congress party in 1991, were aimed at dismantling decades of central planning and bringing foreign investment into key sectors such as telecommunications and

power.

But political instability, especially in the past four years, has hampered the reform process, with governments coming to power and falling swifter than their policies can be properly implemented.

The conservative BJP's reform credentials have traditionally been suspect, but the manifesto of the alliance it heads made a very clear commitment to deepening and speeding up reform.

At the same time, the Congress manifesto included a nod to the BJP's "swadeshi" (economic self-reliance) stance, promising to encourage and support Indian multinationals and Indian brands.

Both parties also pledged to fight India's corner at the World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle in November.

'Barak ready to withdraw from all of Golan'

CAIRO, Aug 18: Prime Minister Ehud Barak is ready to withdraw from all of the Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria, Israel's deputy foreign minister Nawaf Massalha said in remarks published here Wednesday, reports AFP.

Massalha, the first Arab-Israeli in the post, also told Al-Ahram Hebdo that a withdrawal from the Golan as well as from south Lebanon could be decided within two years, while a Palestinian solution could take four years.

The Syrians want negotiations to resume at the point where they stopped in 1996. Massalha was quoted as telling the French-language weekly published in Egypt.

Barak, who was foreign minister at the time, is ready to withdraw the Israeli army to the June 4, 1967 borders, or those that existed just before the Arab-Israeli war in which Syria lost the Golan. Massalha told the paper.

"For him, this commitment must be the result of negotiations and not a prerequisite for negotiations," he added.

Meanwhile, another meeting between Palestinians and Israelis to try to reach an agreement on the Wye River land-for-security agreement broke up early on Wednesday without a deal although the two sides did agree to meet later the same day.

The negotiators remained far apart not just on the timetable for the two delayed military withdrawals from the West Bank to which Israel is committed but on a range of other issues, according to Palestinian senior negotiator Saeb Erakat.

"The talks were tough and difficult. The Israeli could make it easier if they commit themselves to what was written in the agreements and not try to modify them," Erakat told AFP after the meeting.



Russian troops prepare for a raid in Dagestani villages against Islamic fighters under the leadership of Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev and Jordanian Militant Khattab, Tuesday. Moscow dispatched its two top security ministers to Dagestan on Wednesday as Russian reinforcements poured into the region to prepare a second push against Islamic gunmen.

— AFP photo

Russia assails NATO as Serbs face reprisals in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Aug 18: Russia is blaming its NATO peacekeeping partners for on-going attacks against Kosovo Serbs as the rapidly dwindling ethnic group buried their latest victims — killed in a mortar attack in an area where American troops are supposed to keep order, reports AP.

"Violence is raging in Kosovo, the killings of peaceful civilians, arsons and robberies of non-Albanians multiply," the Russian Foreign Ministry said Tuesday. "In essence, ethnic cleansing is in full swing in Kosovo. This is the outcome of the 'policy of pacifying' Albanian separatism on the part of several Western nations."

The statement was a clear reference to American support for ethnic Albanians and their Kosovo Liberation Army during the 78-day NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, which ended when Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic accepted a peace plan in June.

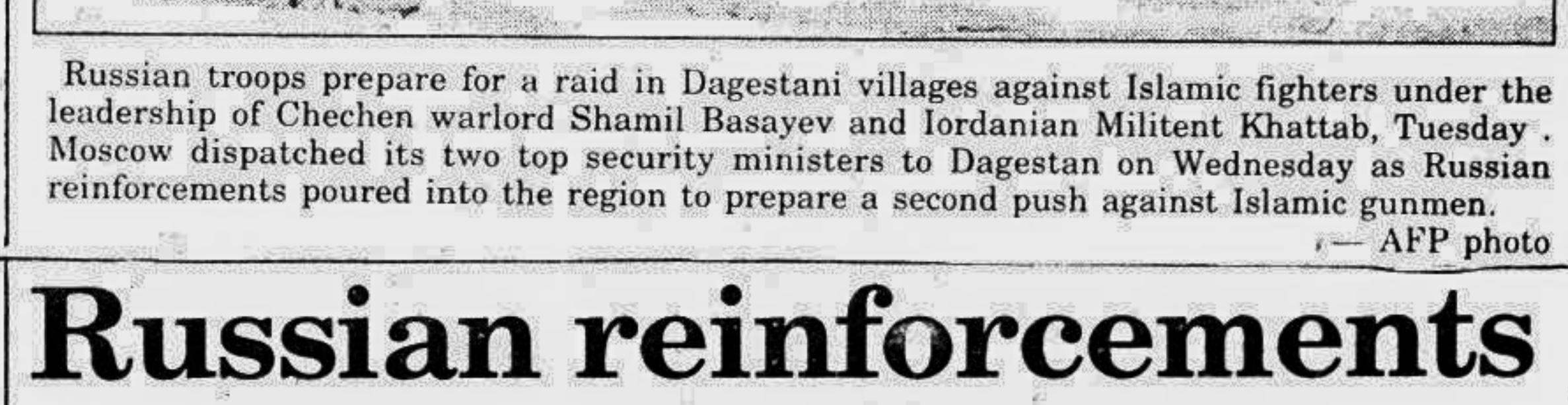
Russia called for "energetic actions" to stop "terrorism, sep-

aratism and ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo. The statement also charged Kosovo's independence-minded ethnic Albanians of openly challenging the international community.

Russia leveled its charge one day after attackers presumed to be ethnic Albanians fired nine mortars onto the southeastern village of Kloko, killing two Serbs and injuring five. The KLA is supposed to have turned over all mortars and heavy weapons to peacekeepers, although it was unclear whether the guerrillas launched the attack.

Hopes that ethnic tensions may be easing were raised Monday when ethnic Albanians in the northern city of Kosovska Mitrovica called off a demonstration after UN and French officials announced a plan to allow 25 Albanian families a day to return to their homes in the Serb-controlled sector.

The city has been divided along ethnic lines, with ethnic Albanians on one side of the Ibar River, the Serbs on the other and French troops trying to keep them separated to prevent violence.



Russian reinforcements pour into Dagestan

MAKHACHKALA, Russia, Aug 18: Moscow dispatched its two top security ministers to Dagestan on Wednesday as Russian reinforcements poured into the republic to prepare a second push against Islamist gunmen holed up in the strife-torn republic's mountains, reports AFP.

Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev and Interior Minister Vladimir Rushailo were scheduled to take part in a meeting of the Dagestan security council where a military plan to dislodge insurgents occupying villages in the Botlikh region would be worked out.

Russia airlifted an additional 500 soldiers and 30 pieces of heavy military equipment into the region overnight, officials said.

Russian forces flew more than 20 sorties over the region in the past 24 hours, managing to destroy a local television broadcast antenna used by the Islamists.

Moscow officials said they had successfully blocked an attempt by gunmen from Chechnya to cross into Dagestan early Wednesday in order to help insurgents occupying the Botlikh region.

The officials reported that Russian defense ministry forces, who have taken over command from interior ministry troops, have also taken control of the Khamari mountain pass, the main link between Chechnya and the western

likh region and is the site of fierce fighting throughout the conflict.

Federal Security Service (former KGB) officials cited by Moscow news agencies said they had intercepted radio communications between the gunmen suggesting that they were preparing a new invasion of Russian territory.

A spokesman in Moscow told Interfax that Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, who is leading the insurgents in Dagestan, was ready to lead an assault on Russia's North Ossetia region on Chechnya's northwestern border.

The North Ossetian military base of Mazdov was used by Russian forces as a springboard during its December 1994 invasion of Chechnya.

Moscow prosecutors have issued arrest warrants for Basayev and his field commanders, identified as the Jordanian-born Hattab and another gunman known only as Gapur.

Basayev already tops Moscow's wanted list for his 1995 war-time siege of a Russian hospital that killed some 200 people.

Russian troops have killed an estimated 600 gunmen since some 1,200 Islamists crossed from Chechnya into Dagestan on August 7 and declared the republic independent.

A Chechen spokesman for the insurgents said Tuesday that the group currently controls 20 villages in western

Dagestan and is planning to mount a new offensive later this week.

Russian officials, however, said that the gunmen only control five towns in the southern Botlikh region, where the group is reportedly surrounded by Russian forces.

Pentagon to review Diana documents for Al Fayed

WASHINGTON, Aug 18: The Pentagon said on Tuesday it had agreed to review documents in its possession about the late Princess Diana to see whether they shed any light on her death two years ago, reports Reuters.

Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon said Defence Department officials doubted there was anything useful in the documents, but that the review would be made at the request of former Sen. George Mitchell, acting at the behest of Mohamed Al Fayed, the Harrods owner whose son died in a Paris car crash with Diana.

"We have found absolutely no connection between any documents in the Defence Department and any information that would shed light on the cause of the accident," Bacon told reporters.

IAF fighters collide in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 18: Two Indian Air Force fighter jets collided at the main airport in the northern Indian state of Kashmir on Wednesday, killing one of the pilots, reports AFP.

The two MiG-21s collided just after take off from Srinagar airport at around 1:40 p.m. (0810 GMT), air force officials said.

One pilot died instantly, while the other was said to be in critical condition.

An army spokesman meanwhile said three more members of the Indian security forces had been killed in separatist-linked violence elsewhere in Kashmir overnight Tuesday.

TOKYO, Aug 18: A four-year-old Japanese boy diagnosed with a minor throat injury later died and was found to have a chopstick stuck in his brain, a report said today, says AFP.

The youngster, Shunzo Sugino, was eating cotton candy when he fell on the stick which then pierced the back of his throat and penetrated his brain, said the Yomiuri Shimbun.

A specialist in Tokyo's Kyorin University Hospital allegedly told the boy's mother that the injury was not serious and sent him home with some antibiotics and painkillers.

"They are trying to neutralise our communications system which has been operating inside Indian-held Kashmir for a decade," a spokesman for Hizbul Mujahideen said in a statement.

The machine, the KAL-5000, will be ready for testing by the end of this year, according to P.H. Ron, head of the centre's accelerator and pulse division.

However, Ron admitted it