

Sept talks could be 'last chance' for Ireland:US

NANTUCKET, Massachusetts, Aug 21: US President Bill Clinton on Friday warned Northern Ireland's Catholics and Protestants that talks in September could be the last chance to revive the province's troubled peace process, reports AFP.

"This deal in September may be our last chance for a generation, and we cannot blow it," Clinton said at a fundraising event here for the American Ireland Fund.

"It's too late to turn back now," the president said of the talks scheduled for September 6 in Belfast.

The province's peace process, launched by the historic Good Friday accord of 1998, remains stalled, with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Protestant unionist parties unable to reach agreement on terms for disarmament and the creation of a joint administration.

many last month. "Part of this problem is trust, and at some point they'll have to figure out a way that they are both trusting each other at the same time," Clinton said Friday.

"It's like two kids standing on high diving board holding hands and looking down to a deep pool," he said.

Some of these folks have been doing it for so long that their whole identity is caught up in the continuation of the conflict," the US president added.

"I am not attacking them but it's true. So what we have to do is find a way to help them let go," he said. "We have got to target those critical decision-makers and give them an image of the life they can have that will be meaningful and rich."

"I talked to Tony Blair and Bertie Aherne about this repeatedly," Clinton said.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart Bertie Aherne have called on former US Senator George Mitchell, architect of the Good Friday accord, to chair the September 6 meeting.



A Turkish woman, sits opposite her destroyed home that is now not only collapsed but in water from the Marmara Sea, wearing a medical mask to keep out the germs Friday in Goleuk. Thousands of people have been killed by this earthquake, Turkey's worst in recent history, mostly by being trapped and crushed by poorly constructed buildings. — AFP photo

Turkey admits problems in rescue operation

ISTANBUL, Aug 21: The Turkish government reportedly dismissed the governors of the three provinces worst hit by the devastating earthquake, as the body count in the region rose over 10,200 early Saturday, reports AFP.

The governors of Izmit, Sakarya and Yalova were replaced by officials dispatched by the interior ministry after days of public criticism of the government's handling of rescue and relief operations, the Turkish Daily News reported.

The governors had been found to be "unable to cope with coordinating the relief effort," the paper said.

A government official in Ankara would neither confirm nor deny the report.

But Mesut Yilmaz, leader of one of the three coalition parties, admitted to shortcomings in the authorities' handling of the disaster.

We have not passed this exam in civil defense very well," Yilmaz was quoted by Turkish papers.

The army meanwhile defended itself against similar criticism.

The Chief of General Staff, General Huseyin Kivrikoglu, said 53,000 soldiers had immediately been deployed in the disaster area to help in rescue efforts.

"Don't demoralize the soldiers," Kivrikoglu warned the Turkish media.

Kivrikoglu also announced that the army was opening its bases in the region to accommodate homeless earthquake victims.

The death toll of the earthquake meanwhile rose to 10,204, amid fears that the final toll in Tuesday's quake could climb as high as 40,000.

That figure was suggested by UN official Sergio Piazzoli, who based his projections on estimates that some 35,000 people

were still trapped under the rubble, alive or dead.

According to a count by the government crisis centre, 34,433 people were injured.

In the hardest-hit province of Izmit alone 4,242 people were killed, while in neighbouring Sakarya 2,995 died, the centre said in a statement carried by the Anatolia news agency.

In Yalova on the Marmara Sea 1,599 died.

In Turkey's largest city Istanbul the toll reached 984 dead, while 226 were killed in Bolu, 122 in Bursa, 33 in Eskisehir and three in Zonguldak.

Israeli soldiers early Saturday found a 10-year-old Israeli girl alive under the rubble, some 100 hours after the Turkish earthquake struck.

Shiran Francois, trapped under a collapsed building in Cinareik, on the Marmara Sea, was taken to a local hospital before being flown back to Israel.

US senator calls for armed UN peacekeepers in E Timor

MALIANA, East Timor, Aug 21: A US senator called here Saturday for armed UN peacekeepers to be sent to East Timor to cap violence in the run-up and during the August 30 self-determination vote, reports AFP.

"I can assure you that we will be asking our government and the United Nations to provide some peace-keeping forces here," Democrat Tom Harkin told a crowd of refugees in a church here.

Harkin, with two other senators, was speaking during a brief helicopter visit to hundreds of refugees camped in a church compound, driven from their homes by pro-Indonesian militia violence.

On his return to the East Timorese capital of Dili, Harkin told AFP he was going to make his request directly to President Bill Clinton.

"I'm going to recommend it to President Clinton. I'm going to do that before the weekend's out," he said.

"I just know that they need

some forces down here with blue helmets that are armed because the situation could get out of hand, because one of the UN officials told me this could be a bloodbath."

Asked how long he thought any such peace-keeping force should stay, Harkin replied: "From now, right through the election and afterwards."

Under an agreement reached between Jakarta and Lisbon in May, Indonesian police are responsible for security in the run-up and during the vote in which East Timorese will accept or reject an Indonesian autonomy offer.

The UN currently has only unarmed police in an advisory role, as well as military observers.

On Friday Harkin and Democratic senator Jack Reed warned that Indonesia's ties with the United States could be harmed if its military fails to maintain security during the landmark vote.

Tight security in Colombo for ruling party rally

COLOMBO, Aug 21: Sri Lankan police and troops tightened security in the capital Colombo Saturday for a ruling party rally marking the fifth anniversary of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's administration, reports AFP.

Several key highways in the capital were closed to traffic on Saturday to allow Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) to stage a procession followed by a public meeting, police said.

All vehicles proceeding to the city on this day will be subject to security checks both by the armed forces and the police," police said in a statement. Parking along the procession route was also banned.

Over 100 floats depicting the work of state institutions were driven, along the procession route guarded by armed police and soldiers.

Armoured tanks were also seen on the road as elite police commandos deployed sniffer dogs to look for explosives at a public ground where President Kumaratunga was due to make an address later Saturday.

The tight measures followed police intelligence reports made public last month that separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas had sent a team of suicide bombers to the capital to target the president and several key figures.

Renewed bombing in Dagestan

GROZNY, Russia, Aug 21: Russian planes are continuing to bomb Islamic fighters in Dagestan, the press service for the Islamists said Saturday from the capital of neighbouring Chechnya, reports AFP.

They reported three deaths over the past few days, while claiming 70 to 100 deaths on the Russian side.

In Moscow, the Russian defence ministry said Russian federal forces had carried out 16 bombing raids in the last 24 hours.

The Chechen security ministry said a Russian plane coming from Dagestan blew up over the town of Urusmarten, 35 kilometres (20 miles) from the Chechen capital Grozny.

The authorities were searching for the pilot, who parachuted to the ground, and a reward had been offered for his capture, said the ministry.

Since the start of fighting on August 7, when Islamist insurgents captured several villages in southwest Dagestan, they had lost 19 fighters, including one of their commanders, Magomed Derbelbelsky, the Islamists' press service said.

But in the 48 hours to early Saturday, they had captured 25 Russian military vehicles, grenade-launchers, machine-guns and ammunition, and killed "between 70 and 100" Russian troops with captured mortars, said the service.

The Russian bombing campaign had killed 100 Islamist insurgents in the last 24 hours, said the Dagestani defence ministry Saturday, quoted by the Russian media.

The bombing had also destroyed a heavy machine gun and military vehicles travelling from Chechnya to join the insurgents, as well as an ammunition dump. Russian troops had also arrested 23 people suspected of helping the Islamist forces.



India's opposition leader Sonia Gandhi looks at a memento presented to her by the president of the All India Newspaper Editors in New Delhi Saturday. The Italian-born Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi filed her candidacy papers to contest next month's general election from the southern state of Karnataka. — AFP photo

Lee has 'misled' Taiwanese on their sovereignty: China

BEIJING, Aug 21: China on Saturday said Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's had misled the island's residents into believing they could decide their own fate, reports AFP.

"Lee took advantage of the fact that some people in Taiwan have not fully recognised the nature of his separatist remarks, as he misled them by claiming that the sovereignty of Taiwan belongs to the Taiwan people," the official Liberation Army daily said in a commentary.

"The Chinese nation is a large family which includes people on both sides of the Taiwan strait. The 'public opinion' of this big family should reflect the opinions and wishes of the entire Chinese nation, not just those confined to a small region," it said.

Though Taiwan has been ruled separately from the mainland since 1949, China views it

as part of its sovereign territory and requires all its diplomatic partners to recognise the fact routinely.

Its accusations that Lee is pursuing a separatist agenda have run hot since the president began advocating a "state to state" relationship between Beijing and Taipei on July 10, igniting a new round of tensions.

Lee's 'two states' statement runs against the public opinion of the whole nation," the commentary said.

"It represents neither the entire Chinese nation, nor compatriots in Taiwan, but only a small number of die-hard separatists on the island."

The article described the separation of the mainland and Taiwan people as a "historic anomaly" from the 1945-49 Chinese civil war.

Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist forces fled to the island to set

up a non-communist enclave as the communists swept to victory.

The commentary also attacked Lee as a politician adept at manipulating public opinion to suit his goals.

"He even went so far as to deceive via 'public opinion polls,'" it said.

According to a poll conducted in May by a Taipei government agency, some 77.5 per cent of Taiwanese recently polled opposed the "one country, two systems" offer, with only four per cent approving the mainland's peace overtures.

China has vowed to retake the island by force if it attempts to declare independence.

In Hong Kong, the Beijing-backed Wen Wei Po daily quoted a Chinese military expert as saying the current crisis could be resolved if Lee retracted his recent remarks on statehood.

Murder of 4 Americans Two Pakistanis to die

KARACHI, Aug 21: An anti-terrorism court here Saturday handed the death penalty to two Pakistanis for the 1997 killing of four US nationals in Karachi, court officials said, reports AFP.

Judge Hussain Bux Khoso found Ahmed Saeed, alias Baram, and Mohammad Salim, alias Ganja, guilty and sentenced them to hang. The two were arrested in Karachi in February.

They were involved in the murders. MQM has been at loggerheads with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government since October when he imposed direct federal rule in Sindh to curb lawlessness and terrorism.

The verdict was announced in the heavily guarded court building situated just yards from a so-called lovers' bazaar where Ephraim Egbu, 42, Joel Enlow, 40, Larry Jennings, 49, and Tracy Rutice, 41, were shot dead.

The four Americans, executives from US oil company Union Texas, were gunned down in Karachi on November 12, 1997.

The attack came days after a Pakistani, Mir Almal Kanshi, was sentenced to death in the United States for the killing of two CIA employees on January 25 1993 outside the agency's headquarters in Virginia.

Reports at that time said the assassination of the Americans could have been a retaliatory action by Kanshi's Pashtoon tribe living in the southwestern province of Baluchistan.

The Americans' Pakistani driver was also killed in the ambush. The US posted a two million dollar reward for the arrest of the killers.

Police said the convicts were from the MQM, which represents Urdu-speaking migrants who came from India after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947.

The party has admitted the two activists belonged to the MQM, but it has denied they

Several anti-terrorism courts have been set up here as part of the crackdown. Since early May they have sentenced more than 50 people, mostly political activists, to death.

MQM says the government's campaign is a conspiracy to eliminate the party and persecute its workers.

The party is currently engaged in a protest campaign against the government.

More than 4,000 people have died in political, ethnic and sectarian violence in Karachi during the last four years. Police blame militants from political factions, sectarian groups and hundreds of independent criminal groups for the unrest.

14 feared drowned in Pak boat capsizes

KARACHI, Aug 21: Fourteen people were feared drowned after a boat carrying a wedding party overturned in the Indus river in the southern province of Sindh, police said Saturday, reports AFP.

The boat carrying 50 passengers capsized Friday in strong winds near the town of Fatehpur Dokri, 500 km west of Karachi.

Residents said 36 people swam ashore while the missing included nine women and three children.

Religious clashes kill 5 in Ambon

AMBON, Indonesia, Aug 21: Renewed Christian-Muslim clashes killed five people in Indonesia's spice islands city of Ambon and left scores injured and hundreds of homes torched, a report and sources said Saturday, reports AFP.

The clashes broke out in five outlying areas over a two-day period starting Thursday.

On Friday troops deterred an attempted attack by Moslem residents on a Christian neighbourhood in Ambon island's northern bayside Poka hamlet. Some of the Christians were held up inside the Pattimura University complex, a church source said.

Cholera claims 10 lives in Pak remote area

ISLAMABAD, Aug 21: Ten children have died of cholera in Pakistan's remote northern area of Skardu in a diarrhoea epidemic that has hit hundreds of people, hospital sources said Saturday, reports AFP.

The district hospital in Skardu (town, around 300 kilometres (187 miles) from Islamabad), has been receiving 200 to 250 outdoor patients for the past four weeks, the hospital's head doctor Kamaluddin Soomro told AFP by phone.

Off the Record

Choosy mosquitoes

MIAMI: Mosquitoes do not randomly perch on just anyone's body and begin sucking blood, but choose their victims selectively, searching for the most aromatically appealing humans, according to a study released on Friday, reports Reuters.

"Mosquitoes use odour to sort attractive people from the unattractive to find those that are most tasty," University of Florida entomologist Jerry Butler said in a statement.

In a study of what attracted mosquitoes to people, Butler said he worked off a theory that they go for humans who provide the richest source of cholesterol and B Vitamins, which the pesky insects need to live but do not produce themselves.

Butler found one sure way to stop attracting the little buggers — stop breathing.

Mosquitoes can sniff out an attractive human dinner target from as far away as 40 miles (64.3 km), Butler said.

When humans exhale, they expel a plume of carbondioxide and other odours that travel through the air. The appetising stir is the olfactory equivalent of a dinner bell, alerting mosquitoes that a warm meal is within range, Butler said.

When a mosquito is trailing an attractive target, it zigzags up the breath plume until it makes contact, landing on the skin and patiently searching for just the right spot to insert its stylet for an eight-to-10 second feeding, Butler said.

Perspiration, a barely avoidable human condition, also is a mosquito lure — but only if the sweat has marinated and formed bacteria, Butler said.

Bathing helps reduce the attractiveness of sticky bodies, Butler added, but after-bath products do not.

Kids were kidding

LONDON: Four children who wanted to get out of a "boring" British beach holiday triggered a major police alert by making an SOS emergency appeal from their parents' car, the press reported Saturday, reports AFP.

As they were being driven to the seaside resort of Bournemouth on the south coast, the children had the bright idea of putting a day-glo poster in the backwindow of the family car which read: "Help us we have been kidnapped. Phone the police."

A motorist who spotted the notice alerted police, after trying in vain for a quarter of an hour to catch up with what he assumed was the kidnappers' car.

"We took this incident very seriously and were desperate to track down the people carrier," Sergeant Lee Collison of Dorsetshire police told reporters.

But when the officers eventually stopped the car, the children owned up to the prank. They said they were unhappy about going to Bournemouth while many of their friends were spending their holidays abroad.

"They were told off and sent on their way," Sergeant Collison said, adding "What's wrong with Bournemouth anyway?"



Newly-crowned Miss Malaysia 1999/2000 Jaclyn Lee Tze Wai, 24 (R) smiles while being kissed by the 1st runner-up Elaine Daly (L) after being announced the winner in Kuala Lumpur Friday. Jaclyn takes home RM 50,000 (13,150 dollars) in cash and will represent Malaysia in the next Miss World contest. Nineteen local beauties took part in the event. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

AIDS kills 650 Cubans since '86: The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has caused 650 deaths in Cuba since 1986, a health specialist said Friday. Xinhua reports from Havana.

There are 2,477 Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) carriers in the country, said Jorge Perez, director of the local Santiago De Las Vegas Hospital. About 75 per cent of the HIV carriers are men, he said.

2 extremists slain in Philippines: Two Muslim extremists were slain in a clash with Marines in the southern island of Sulu, the military said in this southern city yesterday, AFP reports from Philippines.

The troops were pursuing members of the Muslim fundamentalist Abu Sayyaf group which is suspected of beheading two people earlier this month when they caught up to about 30 of the armed fighters on Thursday, local military spokesman Major Salih Indanan said.

Russian defence minister to visit Seoul: Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeev will visit South Korea early next month to boost military exchanges between the two countries, government officials said Saturday, AP reports from Seoul.

During his three-day trip scheduled to begin September 2, Sergeev will meet with his South Korean counterpart, Cho Sung-tae, and other South Korean leaders, Defence Ministry officials said. They refused to divulge further details until the two governments formally announce the trip.

People's parliament formed to oppose Milosevic

BELGRADE, Aug 21: Citizens' protests in the southern Serbian town of Leskovac ended late Friday after 44 consecutive days, the organisers said Saturday, adding they had formed a people's parliament to oppose Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's regime, reports AFP.

Ivan Novkovic, a television engineer jailed for sparking off an anti-government rally in this town on July 5, told Belgrade independent radio B2-92 that the street protests would turn into "public tribunals and other actions."

"The time has come for serious work. There is no need and no time for speeches any more, we should start with deeds," Novkovic said, adding that a "citizens' parliament" had been formed in order to pursue the "fight for democracy."

Novkovic, 34, broke into the broadcast of a European basketball championships game on July 1 to make a public demand for the dismissal of the local chief government official Zivojin Stefanovic, a member of President Slobodan Milosevic's ruling Socialist party.

In response, 20,000 people took to the streets of Leskovac, a town of 170,000 inhabitants on July 5.

Leskovac is around 250 kilometres (150 miles) south of Belgrade.

That gathering snowballed into an anti-Milosevic demonstration, with the crowd chanting for the president to go.

Novkovic was released on August 6, but the local district official brought up charges against him for "misuse of professional position."

"I do not feel guilty, and I will stay here, expecting a dismissal of the charges as unfounded," Novkovic told the radio.

"It is important that we, ordinary citizens, have made a

great step towards the future," he said.

Meanwhile, daily demonstrations against Milosevic continued late Friday in central Belgrade, but his lawyers and Valjevo, independent, Beta news agency reported.

Several hundred protesters in both towns demanded also an urgent release of Bogoljub Arsenijevic Maki, a local artist-turned-leader of the Civic Resistance in Valjevo, who was beaten and arrested in Belgrade earlier this week.

After three days of detention, Arsenijevic was transferred to a prison hospital in Belgrade, but his lawyers and family could not contact him, the agency said.