

International

US panel moves to bolster military ties with Taiwan

WASHINGTON, Oct 27: A key US House of Representatives panel on Tuesday diluted but passed a measure aimed at bolstering US-Taiwan military ties, brushing aside criticisms that the bill would inflame tensions between Taipei and Beijing, reports AFP.

By a 32-6 margin, the House International Relations Committee tempered and approved the "Taiwan Security Enhancement Act" over strong objections from several lawmakers on both sides and a top aide to President Bill Clinton who sought the bill's defeat.

The committee's Republican chairman, Representative Benjamin Gilman, said the measure was needed in the face of China's "overwrought sabre-rattling and the deleterious effect that this has had on regional stability."

"This could be seen as the Taiwan Security Destabilisation Act," Assistant Secretary of State Stanley Roth countered after the hearing. The bill "could be particularly destabilising given the current environment of heightened cross-strait tension and poor Sino-US relations."

The altered bill lacks the original initiative's mention of specific arms -- such as missile defence, air-to-air missiles, and diesel submarines -- which the president could transfer to Taiwan under the bill.

But it keeps provisions calling for Taiwan military officers to have an increased number of slots at US military training facilities, and for the establishment of direct communications between the armed forces of both countries.

The measure also calls for stepped-up Pentagon training and exchange programs with "senior officers," omitting the specific ranks listed in the original bill.

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3 Americans kidnapped in Yemen

SANA, Oct 27: Armed Yemeni tribesmen kidnapped three US citizens, two of them women, and were holding them in a remote valley, a colleague of one of the women told AFP today.

The head of the American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS) in Sanaa, Marta Colburn, aged around 40, was seized together with her parents as they were returning to Sanaa, the colleague said, asking not to be named.

The group was on a tourist trip to the central city of Taiz. Colburn's husband and son remained in Sanaa.

A police official told AFP the three Americans were abducted at 6:00 p.m. (2100 BST) Tuesday on the road to the capital Sanaa from the town of Dhammar to the south.

Tribal sources said the kidnappers belong to the Bani Jabr tribe, who have taken a number of foreigners hostage in the past. They were demanding the release of five fellow tribesmen being held by the government.

BRIEFLY

65 militants surrender in Algeria:

Sixty-five more Islamic militants have turned themselves in to Algerian authorities, hoping to benefit from a peace plan that would grant them amnesty, officials announced Tuesday. AP reports from Algeria.

Eight of the insurgents have already been granted amnesty by a probation committee, officials said.

British climber killed in Himalayas: British climber Ginette Lesley Harrison died in an avalanche on the world's seventh highest mountain in the Himalayas earlier this week, a hiking official said yesterday. Reuter reports from Kathmandu.

"We lost Ginette," Murri Sharma, chief of Parivar Trekking, the agency handling the expedition, quoted her climber husband Gary Pfisterer as saying.

15 die in bus plunge in Sri Lanka: A packed bus veered off the road and plunged into a precipice in central Sri Lanka, killing 15 and injuring 35, a police official said Wednesday. AP reports from Colombo.

The bus, which was travelling from the capital of Colombo to the central town of Gampola, lost control and skidded off the road Tuesday, falling 10 meters (yards), near the town of Pussellawa, 90 kilometers (55 miles) east of the capital.

UN appeals for \$199m aid for E Timor

Indonesian officer freed

DILI, East Timor, Oct 27: Pro-independence guerrillas have freed a captured Indonesian army officer, clearing the way for Jakarta to withdraw its last remaining troops from East Timor, as the UN appealed to day for 199 million dollars of emergency aid for the territory, reports AFP.

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