

## International

India among top 10 to have highest number of kidnappings

WASHINGTON, May 12: India is among ten nations reported to have the highest number of kidnappings for ransom, according to a control Risks Group, reports PTI.

Out of the 1,789 kidnappings for ransom reported worldwide in 1999, nearly 17 were from India, says a Hiscox Group study reported in The Wall Street Journal.

Other in the list included Colombia, which topped to list with 979 kidnapping for ransom cases. Mexico with 402, former Soviet Union with 105, Brazil with the Philippines with 39, Nigeria with 24, India with 17, Ecuador and Venezuela with 12 each and South Africa with 10.

There were believed to have been more kidnappings, but many victims did not report their experience, the agency said.

The latest case, says The Wall Street Journal involves 21 foreign tourists and resort workers kidnapped by a Muslim guerrilla group from a Malaysian diving resort and held in the Philippines, adding in 1993, four engineers were kidnapped for ransom in Chechnya and beheaded.

Several companies have also introduced kidnap and ransom insurance for their employees but have asked them not to advertise the fact lest the information make them a target.

If an executive sitting in a bar in a high-risk country lets it slip that he is covered by a corporate insurance policy against kidnapping and ransom, he may possibly be making the biggest mistake of his life, said Rob Davies, a senior special risks under writer at Hiscox.

Hiscox has about 60 per cent of the 110 million-dollar annual global market in premium income for kidnap and ransom insurance.

## 26 killed in Kashmir bus accident

JAMMU, India, May 12: At least 26 passengers were killed early today and more than 30 injured after a bus plunged down a gully in the Indian state of Kashmir, police said, reports AFP.

A police spokesman said the accident occurred near the town of Doda, some 190 kilometres (118 miles) from the Kashmir winter capital Jammu.

"The dead include three women and two children," he said. "More than 12 of the wounded are critically wounded and nine of them have been flown to Jammu for emergency medical treatment.

"We have recovered 26 bodies but the toll may rise," he said.

He said rescue teams and local villagers were at the site to look for bodies and transport the injured to nearby helipad from where they were being flown to hospital.

Highway accidents are frequent in Himalayan Kashmir, which is filled with narrow mountain roads and hairpin bends.

## Heavy fighting between Ethiopian, Eritrean troops

NAIROBI, May 12: Violent clashes broke out today between Ethiopian and Eritrean troops along their disputed border on the second anniversary of the start of the conflict, both sides said, reports AFP.

Two days ahead of general elections planned in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa launched a new two-pronged offensive shortly after midnight Thursday, the Eritrean embassy in Nairobi charged in a statement sent to AFP.

The Ethiopian government spokesman confirmed "heavy fighting" along the border's central and western fronts, adding later that it had spread eastward.

It was the first reported bout of fighting along the ill-defined border since February and followed a breakdown in indirect peace talks held in Algiers last week.

The reported offensive came just as the UN Security Council had been expected to make a last-minute appeal to Ethiopia and Eritrea later Friday to avoid a renewal of a war that one diplomat said would be deadlier than the conflict in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) combined.

Hundreds of thousands of troops from both sides face each other across the 1,000-kilometre border in an on-again off-again war fought using murderous World War I-era methods.

Tens of thousands of troops have already been killed since the war first erupted in May 1998, five years after Ethiopia granted independence to Eritrea, a former province that assured access to Red Sea ports.

The statement from the Eritrean embassy noted that earlier this week Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had told a visiting UN Security Council mission that Ethiopia was "going to war and that it will resolve the conflict very soon."

In New York, Britain's ambassador to the United Nations, Jeremy Greenstock, said late Thursday that he had drafted a council resolution "urging the two parties to come back to talks" rather than drift to war.

## Tamil Tigers poised to recapture Jaffna

Lanka buys jets, arms from Israel, Pakistan

LONDON, May 12: Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels appear set to recapture their former stronghold of Jaffna, lost five years ago, after overwhelming government troops in a lightning advance, reports Reuters.

The government failed to deny a rebel statement, issued in London late on Thursday, that rebel forces were only one km from the administrative centre of the city, hub of the battle-scarred Jaffna peninsula.

Nor was there any immediate prospect of negotiations to ease the conflict or the plight of civilians caught up in it.

Refugees said food and power were short in the town and that both rebel and government forces were ordering away or evacuating civilians to get them clear of the fighting.

The International Committee of the Red Cross voiced concern about the humanitarian consequences and urged both sides to protect the 500,000

civilians on the Jaffna peninsula.

But there was little firsthand information from the city itself as the government, which has already imposed strict censorship and banned journalists from travelling to the war zone, prohibited all live radio and television broadcasts.

The Hindu said Sri Lanka, which is fighting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the northern Jaffna peninsula, had already bought seven Israeli Kfir jets and 24 containers of arms and equipment.

The presence of Israeli Kfirs is meant to build the depleted stocks of the Sri Lankan Air Force, the Hindu said. "With the Sri Lankan army losing ground, its airforce which already has a handful of Kfirs is under pressure to deliver."

The Hindu said that a Pakistani ship, with multibarred rocket launchers and 1,600 rockets was on its way to Sri Lanka. "Besides, Pakistan has already flown in ammunition supplies to Colombo."



Sri Lanka's opposition legislators march toward the office of Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike in Colombo yesterday demanding weekly sessions of parliament to discuss the ongoing fighting near Jaffna. Government forces are resisting a major offensive by Tamil Tiger guerrillas, who have vowed to retake the town of Jaffna in the northern part of the island.

— AFP photo

## UNSC expresses solidarity with peace force in Sierra Leone

UNITED NATIONS, May 12: Members of the Security Council expressed solidarity with the UN peacekeeping force in Sierra Leone late on Thursday after UN Secretary General Kofi Annan urged them not to fail that country, reports AFP.

The plight of the Sierra Leone and its people has become a crucial test of that fundamental solidarity between peoples, rising above race and above geography, which is the most basic guiding principle of this Organisation," he said.

Annan led speakers at a formal emergency session in paying tribute to the approximately 500 members of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) who are held by rebels there, and demanding their release.

While the French ambassador, Jean-David Levitte, said "tonight is the time for solidarity," the debate was not free of disagreement — even recrimination.

Several developing countries, notably Bangladesh, Ja-

maica and Namibia, called for a revision of UNAMSIL's mandate, permitting it to use force to carry out the council's decisions under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter.

Annan said he was "not necessarily opposed" to this, but cautioned the council to make sure the force had the means to carry out any new mandate.

Demanding "the immediate and unconditional release of all United Nations personnel" held by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Annan said that RUF leader Foday Sankoh would be held accountable for their safety.

These are soldiers who came to Sierra Leone not as enemies, but as friends and peacemakers," Annan said.

The force had been attacked "by one of the parties that had pledged to cooperate with it, before it had been properly deployed," he said.

UNAMSIL had to be strengthened, he said, adding that reinforcements were on their way, including units with

artillery and helicopter gunships.

When all the promised extra troops had arrived, Annan said, they would probably exceed the limit of 11,100 authorised by the Security Council.

Only three of the eight countries with troops in UNAMSIL, and only seven African states, including Sierra Leone, took part in the debate.

The representative of Bangladesh, Anwarul Chowdhury, hit back at those who blamed the debacle of UNAMSIL on ill-trained and badly equipped troops.

If developing countries stopped providing troops, he said, "There would be no peace-keeping in the world tomorrow, except in a few choice areas of strategic importance" to powerful nations.

Algeria's ambassador, Abdallah Baali, said that unless the UN reassured its authority, it would be seen as "a hollow man, unable to command respect."

The fire had already destroyed 7,200 hectares of forest and forced the evacuation of Los Alamos, White Rock and Es-

## US begins investigation into Los Alamos fire

Nuclear materials in lab safe

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, May 12: The US government was beginning to investigate today how a small fire set a week ago by rangers in New Mexico developed into a massive wildfire that has forced more than 20,000 people to flee three towns and is surrounding a nuclear laboratory, reports AFP.

The fire has already destroyed 7,200 hectares of forest and forced the evacuation of Los Alamos, White Rock and Es-

panola.

Park Superintendent Roy Weaver assumed responsibility for the fire and on Thursday was suspended with pay pending an investigation by the US Park Service, CNN said.

There are allegations that Weaver ignored a weather forecast faxed to the park before the controlled burn was set that warned of strong winds, which coupled with a severe drought in the area increased the potential for fire.

Ironically, national parks regularly use controlled burns to limit brush growth in the forests that can fuel wildfires.

"I think in the short term, we

are going to be ordering a lot more people in," he told CNN.

He said his department

would investigate how a small

controlled fire set by the Na-

tional Park Service May 4 to

clear underbrush in Bandelier

National Monument, south of

Los Alamos, burned out of con-

trol.

Park Superintendent Roy

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was suspended with pay pend-

ing an investigation by the US

Park Service, CNN said.

"All the lab buildings are se-

ure," he told reporters here.

"We are monitoring this ex-

tremely carefully but our lab

buildings are secure."

Los Alamos laboratory

spokesman Jim Damneskiold

said the plutonium at the site

is stored in concrete bunkers

"built to withstand all kind of

potential destruction, including

a plane crash, bombings and of

course a fire."

The scientists studied 13

young haemorrhage patients

and found nine out of 10 had under-

lying blood vessel problems.

Three of the study group, with

an average age of 31, were not

well enough to undergo exami-

nation.

There is very good evidence

that amphetamines actually

cause inflammation of blood

vessels in the brain," one of the

scientists, Andrew McEvoy, told Reuters.

"Obviously that can cause

aneurysms (blood filled sacs) to

develop and lead to brain

haemorrhages."

Cocaine caused blood vessels

leading to the brain to spasm,

restricting blood flow and po-

tentially causing a stroke, he said.

McEvoy said stimulants also

raised blood pressure — which

doctors traditionally thought to

be the main cause of brain

haemorrhages.

Doctors treating haemor-

rhage patients who have taken

drugs should refer them to a

hospital's neurological or neu-

rosurgical department so they

can be operated on if necessary.

Brain haemorrhage patients

who had abused drugs were

found to have higher mortality

rates than those who did not use

drugs.

Especially with cocaine use

we found that young adults who

would expect to do better than older patients actually did worse," McEvoy said.

The higher death rate may be

due to dehydration and mal-

nourishment among drug

abusers, as well as their se-

cretive nature which often leads

them to wait longer before seek-

ing treatment, he said.

Father hires

goons to

kill his son