

# The World

## Musharraf to attend ECO summit in Iran

ISLAMABAD, June 8: Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf will leave for Iran on Friday to attend a summit of the 10-nation Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), a foreign office statement said, reports AFP.

The two-day summit, opening on Saturday, will discuss proposals for the expansion of trade and communications among its member states.

The ECO membership comprises Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

Afghanistan is also a member, but most ECO states recognise former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was ousted from Kabul by the Taliban militia in 1996.

The foreign office statement said the total of intra-regional trade at present, amounting to 4.5 billion dollars, was a "small fraction" of the global exports of the ECO countries.

"The potential for increase in commercial and economic interaction among ECO countries is considerable," it added.

In a bid to increase intra-ECO trade, a ministerial meeting of the organisation held in Islamabad in April finalised a transit-trade framework agreement.

Musharraf will leave Iran for a two-day visit to Oman on Sunday, the statement said, adding that he would hold talks with Sultan Qaboos on bilateral relations and other matters of mutual interest.

During his stay Pakistan and Oman will also sign a maritime boundary agreement, it said.

Pakistan and Oman have traditionally enjoyed "close and fraternal relations rooted in shared religious, cultural and historical affinities," the statement noted.

## Speight's supporters beat up police officer

SUVA, Fiji, June 8: In another sign of rising tension among Fijian coup leader George Speight's supporters, a police officer was savagely beaten Thursday and briefly detained at parliament where gunmen are holding 31 hostages, reports AP.

While many of the 300 people still camped inside the parliamentary compound three weeks after six gunmen stormed it and took Fiji's government hostage are calm and peaceful, a group of about 40 young men remain on a knife edge and apparently liable to explode into violence at the least provocation.

The victim of Thursday's beating, an ethnic Fijian policeman visited parliament to pick up a taxi stolen last week, Speight said.

For unknown reasons, the officer was attacked by dozens of Speight's supporters who kicked and punched him even as he lay on the ground. After the beating, rebels hosed the victim's blood off the road where he fell.

The officer was then detained for about an hour until an unarmed army major negotiated his release with rebels. A police spokesman could not be reached for comment.

A former Fijian lawmaker who visited the hostages Thursday told the country's TV1 network that they were tired and homesick but were being well looked after.

"They were very tired," George Shiu Rau said. "They were very well — very well kept, very well fed."

The incident came the day after Speight warned the military of serious reprisals if soldiers shoot at his gunmen.

## Anti-US protest 21 leftist students arrested in Seoul

SEOUL, June 8: Police on Thursday arrested 21 leftist students who staged an illegal anti-American street demonstration in Seoul, reports AP.

Chanting "Yankee go home," the students tried to march to the US Embassy in central Seoul. They were stopped by police about 50 meters (yards) from the embassy compound.

South Korean law bans protest rallies or demonstrations within 100 meters (yards) from foreign diplomatic missions.

The students demanded the withdrawal of 37,000 American troops stationed in South Korea under a defense treaty.

Anti-US protests have increased since early May when a US Air Force fighter jet dropped six bombs on the Koon-Ni Range near the west coast village of Mas Hyang, 50 miles southwest of Seoul.

Villagers claimed that six people were slightly injured and walls were cracked and windows shattered by the impact. They demanded relocation of the range which has been a constant source of friction.

But last week, the US and South Korea militaries said the impact from the bombing was limited and did not cause any injuries or property damage and reconfirmed their plans to maintain the range.

Leftists seized on the case to mount anti-US protests. More than 100 students were detained last month for trying to march to the US Embassy and 22 of them were arrested, including three who jumped over the embassy wall.

# Lankan police detain 15 after suicide bombing

COLOMBO, June 8: Police detained 15 men today as suspects in a suicide bombing that killed a Cabinet minister and 20 others in a suburb of the capital, Sri Lanka's president urged people to refrain from retaliatory attacks on the Tamil minority, reports AP.

The government blamed Wednesday's bombing on separatist rebels fighting for a homeland for the Tamil minority, and mobs in the neighbourhood threw stones at Tamil-owned shops in revenge.

The 15 suspects were taken at dawn from apartments and houses near the site of the bombing and were being interrogated, said a police official at the local station, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Their anxious relatives hovered outside the station in the Ratmalana industrial area.

A nighttime curfew was imposed after mobs attacked Tamil shops in the district, 15 kilometres from the centre of Colombo. There were no reports

of injuries.

A suicide bomber with explosives strapped to his body killed Industrial Development Minister Clement V. Gooneratne on Wednesday along with 20 others during a street drive to raise funds for soldiers fighting Tamil rebel in the northern Jaffna peninsula. The government had declared Wednesday its first-ever War Heroes Day.

A Claymore mine explosion set off by suspected Tamil Tiger rebels killed three members of a civilian security patrol and wounded four Thursday outside the northern town of Vavuniya, a local police officer said.

He said the remote-controlled mine exploded while a group of home guards — civilians trained in handling weapons — were on a routine patrol outside Vavuniya, 210 kilometres north of the capital. It was the last government-held area before Jaffna, the peninsula where the rebels are fighting to create a homeland for the minority Tamils.

About half of the 60 people wounded in Wednesday's bombing were still being treated Thursday, said Dr. W. G. Gunawardena, the director of Kalubowila Hospital. The slain Cabinet minister's widow, Shyama, remained in critical condition with internal injuries, he said.

The police official at the local station said the bomber was a man, although in the past women have cut their hair and posed as men in suicide bombings. The government banned public officials from providing information to the press in February.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga appealed for calm Thursday, saying the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were trying to "inflame communal passions by provoking the people."

"I appeal to all Sri Lankans to consider this earnestly and act with patience to maintain peace at this hour," Kumaratunga said.

# One million stage peace march in India

GUWAHATI, India, June 8: At least one million people across India's seven northeastern states took to the streets today to protest at lingering separatist violence in the region, official sources said, reports AP.

The protesters marched through the streets of major towns in the seven troubled states, holding anti-militancy posters and banners, shouting peace slogans and singing patriotic songs.

"All the chief ministers of the region decided last month during a meeting to hold a peace march through the region on June 8," E.K. Mawlong, chief minister of Meghalaya state, said.

"The aim is to send a message to the insurgents that the people in general do not approve any form of violence and want peace."

More than 50,000 people have died in India's northeast since the country's independence in 1947, due to a range of separatist campaigns for independent homelands waged by different ethnic peoples and tribes.

"The aim of the march is to mobilise public opinion against all forms of militant violence and to help build an atmosphere where the rebels can come back and join the mainstream," Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, chief minister of Assam, the most prominent of the region's states, told AFP.

The march was held simultaneously in all the region's provinces.

The participants, including children, pledged to fight terrorism and restore peace in the states.

"We want peace back in the region. To achieve that the state governments must adopt a sincere approach towards finding out a peaceful solution to the region's insurgency problem," Suren Baruah, a relative of a

separatist militant leader from Assam, said.

The seven regional governments have vowed to jointly combat militancy and mount pressure on New Delhi to aid peace talks with the rebels.



Indian boy scouts display placards during a peace march in the Assamese capital Guwahati yesterday. At least one million people across India's seven northeastern states took to the streets to protest against lingering separatist violence in the region. — AFP photo

# Australia evacuates foreigners from Solomon Islands

WELLINGTON, June 8: Fearful that rebel combat in the Solomon Islands could intensify, the Australian navy sent a ship to Guadalcanal on Thursday and began evacuating hundreds of nervous foreigners, officials said, reports AP.

Some 200 people had boarded the Australian landing ship by early evening, with another 200 ready to go, said New Zealand High Commissioner Nick Hurley in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands.

Australian Defence Minister John Moore said there are 700 Australians in the Solomon Islands but the HMAS Tobruk could take up to 800 people if that many wanted to flee "the further deterioration of the security situation in and around Honiara."

Hurley said at least 30 of the 220 New Zealanders in the tiny South Pacific nation were getting out.

Honiara has been calm, despite the turmoil that has gripped the Solomon Islands since armed rebels seized the prime minister on Monday and rival groups from two islands

then escalated a conflict that has gone on for 18 months.

The heaviest fighting this week has been near the international airport east of Honiara, where groups of rebel forces have exchanged gunfire and one side used a stolen police gunboat on Wednesday to attack its enemies on the shore.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff said that despite an agreement on Wednesday to resolve the Solomon Islands government crisis, the nation's prime minister, Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, was under house arrest Thursday.

Goff, who has been closely watching the situation, said it was unclear whether a rebel negotiator, lawyer Andrew Nori, had reneged on the deal signed a day earlier, or whether rebel leaders had lost control of their gunmen.

A radio report early Thursday from the Solomon Island Broadcasting Co. said Ulufa'alu's residence was surrounded by armed men, but that there had been no new combat in the areas around the airport.

The broadcaster's Web site

on Thursday quoted Ulufa'alu as saying of his seizure:

"Literally, it's a coup." Rebel migrants from the island of Malaita are fighting to avoid being thrown off of the main island of Guadalcanal — and they have stepped up their combat against indigenous Guadalcanal islanders with weapons that were stolen in a raid on the armory shortly before they captured Ulufa'alu.

Goff said Thursday night he had been incorrect earlier in the day when he said another top official, Governor-General Sir John Latil, was also under house arrest.

Goff said he and other ministers from Commonwealth countries hoped to visit the Solomon Islands soon for a firsthand look at the situation, although the airport remains closed.

Nori's rebels used a stolen police gunboat on Wednesday to attack native Guadalcanal militants, from a group called the Isatabu Freedom Movement, on beaches near the capital's airport, officials have said.

# World leaders mourn Obuchi

TOKYO, June 8: World dignitaries joined an emotion-laden service today for former Japanese prime minister Keizo Obuchi, but also took time to grapple over an historic Korean summit next week, reports AFP.

Six thousand people, including US President Bill Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, packed a Tokyo hall for the emotional farewell to Obuchi, who died May 14 at the age of 62.

The former Japanese leader was felled by a stroke while still in office and slipped into a coma for six weeks before his death.

"Our country's future is still unclear," said Mori, who faces elections on June 25.

"We have lost you but we will join forces and remember what you told the people: constructive optimism with a solid will, in other words — thinking of a glass as being half full, not half empty."

"You were a good husband and father of three as you thought much of your family," Mori said of his friend and predecessor.

Obuchi's 59-year-old widow Chizuko wept.

She earlier accompanied her 29-year-old son Go as he carried the former prime minister's ashes into the packed Nippon Budokan sports hall, surrounded by a 600-strong honour guard and guarded by 10,000 police.

Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako also attended.

But on the sidelines of the service, the diplomatic agenda was heavy, with the June 12-14 summit between North and

South Korea vying for attention with coups on two Pacific islands.

In half-hour talks with Mori, the US president said the Korean summit was extremely important, according to a Japanese foreign ministry official who was present at the meeting.

North Korea's attempts to normalise relations with South Korea and other countries were important, Clinton was quoted as saying by the official, who spoke in Japanese.

Japan's prime minister said the Korean summit was also important for Japan and urged close contact between Tokyo, Seoul and Washington in aligning North Korea policy.

Mori also met with the South Korean leader.

The Japanese prime minister welcomed the heightened diplomatic profile taken by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, who made a secret May 29-31 visit to Beijing ahead of the summit.

Mori was to meet after the service with members of the South Pacific Forum, which groups South Pacific island nations along with Australia and New Zealand.

Australia's Prime Minister John Howard, besides joining the South Pacific Forum talks, planned to meet Indonesia's leader for their first summit since the East Timor crisis.

During a reception for world leaders, Howard and Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid were to try to mend relations, frayed when Australia led a multinational peace force to East Timor.



Go Obuchi (C), holding an urn containing his father's ashes, and Obuchi's widow Chizuko (L) follow Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (bottom R) as they leave the funeral of former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in Tokyo yesterday. Obuchi died on May 14 after suffering a massive stroke. — AFP photo

## Taiwan to buy weapons systems for F-16s from Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 8: The Pentagon has announced sales of two weapons systems to Taiwan designed to improve the defensive and navigation capabilities of its F-16 fighters, reports AP.

Taiwan will pay \$122 million for 48 electronic countermeasures pods, which are designed for use on F-16s to jam or interfere with enemy anti-aircraft radar signals, under the deal announced Wednesday.

Taiwan also will pay \$123 million for 39 sets of Pathfinder/Sharpshooter pods, which provide low-altitude navigation and defensive capability.

US arms sales to Taiwan are frequently criticised by China, which views them as unwarranted US interference in Chinese affairs. The US view is that sales of defensive arms are justified under the Taiwan Relations Act.

The Pentagon said the sales of electronic countermeasures pods and Pathfinder/Sharpshooter pods "will not affect the basic military balance in the region."

The United States does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, which split from China amid civil war in 1949. China considers Taiwan to be a breakaway province and has not ruled out using force to reunite Taiwan with the mainland.

## Ferry sinks in Indonesia: 30 feared dead

JAKARTA, June 8: More than 30 Indonesians were feared dead after a ferry sank at sea between Java and the resort island of Bali, a local official said Thursday, reports AP.

Karngun Sudono, an Indonesian seaport official in the East Javan town of Ketapang, said 49 people were rescued after the Wednesday night accident in the Bali Straits.

The 432-ton ferry was on a regular trip from Ketapang to the Bali port of Gilimanuk, carrying 15 cars, two motorcycles and about 80 people.

Sudono said the search was still underway for the missing passengers. Seaport officials were trying to ascertain the exact number of people who were on board on the ferry. Three bodies have been found so far.

The ferry sank one hour after departing Ketapang, about 800 kilometers (500 miles) east of Jakarta. The cause of the accident was still not known, Sudono said.

## British diplomat shot dead in Athens

ATHENS, June 8: A British defence attaché was killed today in an ambush shooting that police suspect was the work of terrorists, reports AP.

The victim, identified in media reports as Brig. Stephen Saunders, was shot in the head and chest as he drove to work, authorities said. He died about three and a half hours after the shooting.

If a terrorist link is established, Greece could come under severe international pressure for a massive crackdown. US officials have repeatedly accused Greece of ineffective counterterrorism measures against incidents ranging from arson strikes to killings blamed on the elusive November 17 group.

The spotlight is also on Greece to develop a security plan for the 2004 Olympics. The shooting of the British diplomat occurred near the main stadium for the games.

According to police, two men on a motorcycle opened fire at the diplomat's car around 7:45 am on a main avenue connecting the capital's northern suburbs to the city center.

Public Order Ministry General Secretary Dimitris Efthymiadis said the attack was apparently the work of terrorists and police are "investigating

in this direction."

Suspicion immediately fell on the terrorist group November 17, which has claimed responsibility for 21 slayings since 1975. The group's victims include four Americans, including a CIA station chief. No known member of the group has ever been caught.

The attackers used a .45 caliber weapon — a trademark of November 17, which takes its name from the 1973 student-led uprising against the military junta that ruled Greece from 1967-74.

The last slaying claimed by November 17 was in May 1997 when Greek shipowner Constantinos Peratikos was gunned down leaving an office.

The side and method of the Thursday attack was almost identical to other November 17 killings: a 1983 ambush that killed US Navy Capt. George Tsantes and his driver and the 1988 slaying of Greek industrialist Alexandros Athanasias.

The group has never targeted a Briton, but has claimed responsibility for bomb attacks against British banks and other sites. Last year, the group issued a communiqué challenging authorities to "come and get us."

## China to hold non-proliferation talks in July

BEIJING, June 8: China confirmed Thursday it would hold weapons non-proliferation talks with the United States in July, formally ending a ban imposed after US planes bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade last year, reports AP.

And a Western diplomatic source told AFP that US Defense Secretary William Cohen was expected in Beijing next month for his first visit since the May 7, 1999 incident during NATO's bombing campaign in Serbia.

The embassy bombing killed three Chinese citizens, injured 20 others and deeply soured Sino-US relations.

Zhang Oiyue, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirmed a statement by a senior US State Department official this week that the disarmament talks would be held next month.

However, Zhang said the specific timing and agenda were still under discussion.

"I think for China and the United States there have been exchange of views (and) I think to conduct exchange of views on this particular issue is useful," she told a regular press briefing.

China suspended talks over security, human rights and bilateral trade after the bombing.



US showbiz icon Madonna accompanied by Guy Ritchie (R) arrive for the UK Charity Premiere of John Schlesinger's "The Next Best Thing" at the Odeon West End in London's Leicester Square on Wednesday. — AFP photo

## Burglary at Madonna's home

LONDON, June 8: Pop star Madonna's luxury home in London was burgled while she was celebrating the premier of her new film, the Sun newspaper said today, reports Reuters.

Pregnant Madonna, who had dinner with her boyfriend British film director Guy Ritchie and actor Rupert Everett after the showing of "The Next Best Thing," returned home in the early hours of Wednesday to find police at her door step.

But the mass-circulation Sun said nothing had been stolen.

Officers told the 41-year-old American superstar that thieves had forced their way through the front gate of her two million pound (\$3 million) mansion, but failed to gain entry to the house.

The thieves, however, managed to break into her gardener's quarters where they stole a bag with a credit card.

A bag was stolen from the premises which contained a credit card, wallet and some keys," police told the Sun.

Last month Ritchie, 31, was arrested on suspicion of assaulting a man outside Madonna's home in Kensington.

# BRIEFLY

**Gandhi's grandson new envoy to Lanka:** India yesterday named a grandson of its independence hero, Mahatma Gandhi, as its new envoy to Sri Lanka and said the emissary was experienced with the situation in the war-torn nation, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The appointment of Gopal Krishna Gandhi as Indian High Commissioner in Colombo is the first political appointment to such a post in recent years, foreign ministry spokesman RS Jassal here said.

Gandhi, who would replace India's chief diplomat Shiv Shankar Menon shortly in Colombo, served as an assistant high commissioner in the Indian consulate in Sri Lanka's central Kandy district in 1978-82.

**Ex-Serb commander killed:** Former Bosnian Serb paramilitary commander Ljubisa Savic "Mauzer" was shot dead late on Wednesday in the eastern town of Bijeljina, Bosnia radio reported Thursday, Reuters reports from Sarajevo.

Savic, commander of the Panthers paramilitary unit in the 1992-95 Bosnian war, was in his car when shots were fired from another vehicle at around 9 PM local time (0100 BST), the radio quoted local police as saying. Savic was one of the founders in 1990 of the headline Serb Democratic Party (SDS) of former Bosnian Serb leader and indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic.

# 17 Russian troops killed in Chechen suicide attack

MOSCOW, June 8: At least 17 Russian soldiers were killed Wednesday when two women drove a truck packed with high explosives into an army base in Chechnya, in the first Chechen suicide bomb attack, a rebel spokesman said, reports AFP.

The terrorist strike, on a Russian base in Alkhan-Yurt west of Grozny, would mark a deadly switch in rebel tactics after more than nine months of fighting in the breakaway republic.

Around 2:00 pm two women, including the cousin of warlord Arbi Barayev, Khala Barayeva, smashed a lorry packed with TNT into the Russian base in Alkhan-Yurt, senior rebel spokesman Movladi Udugov said.

"The two women were killed as well as at least 17 Russian soldiers," said Udugov, who was speaking by telephone from an undisclosed location.

"I am going to my death, in

the name of Allah and the freedom of the Chechen people," Khala Barayeva told friends before embarking on the suicide attack, Udugov added.

Warlord Arbi Barayev, one of the Chechen field commanders who has mounted the most ambushes of Russian troops in Chechnya, praised his cousin for her "heroic act," according to the spokesman.

On September 20, another warlord, Shamil Basayev, threatened to unleash a wave of Islamic suicide attacks on Russia — a threat that was never carried out — and announced the formation of units of Kamikaze fighters.

Contacted by AFP early evening, the office of President Vladimir Putin's chief spokesman on Chechnya, Sergei Yastrebinskiy, had no immediate comment on the report.

There was no independent confirmation of the attack or the number of casualties.

# Familiar tensions rise at global women's meeting

UNITED NATIONS, June 8:

Hours before the end of a week-long UN meeting to review progress on women's equality, familiar tensions escalated in negotiating rooms on lifestyles, abortion, religion, the family and sexual rights in general, reports Reuters.

Women's groups from Turkey, India and Colombia lobbying governments blamed the Vatican and some Islamic nations for stalling the talks while American abortion foes said the West was foisting "sexual colonialism" on the world.

At issue is a follow-up of the five-year old prescription for action negotiated at a landmark women's conference in Beijing five years ago, which drew over 30,000 activists and government officials from around the world. Some 10,000 grassroots

groups are in New York.

A new document is to emerge by Friday but reaching agreement on some controversial paragraphs appears elusive, with many governments saying the Vatican, Algeria, Iran, Libya, Pakistan, the Sudan and Nicaragua are holding up action on approaches to key issues.

Consequently, Nigeria was unable to keep together developing nations in one group, known as the G-77. Southern Africans and many Latin Americans, among others, refused to try to reach common cause with the more conservative nations.

Under arcane UN negotiating rules at conference, delegates try to reach agreement on each world of a declaration by consensus rather than a vote. This means nearly every country has veto rights.

"Right now they should just

stop delaying and move forward... let the document get completed," Gita Sen of the Indian group Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, said at a Wednesday news conference.

Nalan Hodoglugli of the Hacettepe University Medical Faculty in Turkey said language on marital rape, an important issue for Turkish women, was too vague, and could weaken some provisions agreed on in Beijing.

"The bottom line is... we have a document on men and women that says nothing," Hodoglugli said.

Ana Gonzalez of the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network in Colombia said her country was under pressure to fall in line with conservative groups.