

International

India, Lanka hold talks as fighting rages in Jaffna

COLOMBO, June 12: India's Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh held talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga and other leaders here today amid continuing fighting between government forces and Tamil Tiger rebels in the north of the country, reports AFP.

Singh met Kumaratunga at her tightly-guarded Temple Trees residence, officials said. The Indian minister later had a round of talks with opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

After meeting with Singh, President Kumaratunga and her arch rival Wickremesinghe had separate talks as part of their bipartisan moves to hammer out a consensus on a political package to end the bloodshed, officials said.

Singh and his Sri Lankan counterpart Lakshman Kadirgamar were earlier due to hold a joint press conference but later it was announced that Singh would go it alone and meet with only Indian journal-

ists here.

Analysts saw the calling off of the joint press conference as a sign that the two sides may not have had adequate common ground to project in a positive light.

India had offered 100 million dollars in loans to Sri Lanka and discussed possibilities of importing wheat, rice and sugar from India, official sources said.

However, there was no fresh initiative on the political front. Diplomats and analysts are sceptical about the prospects of India helping to resolve the conflict that has claimed over 60,000 lives in the past two decades and escalated in April with a renewed offensive by Tamil Tiger rebels.

New Delhi last month rejected a request from Colombo for military assistance to stop the advances of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).



Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh (R) speaks with Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga yesterday as they opened informal talks in Colombo. Singh arrived in Sri Lanka for an overnight visit amid calls at home to partition the smaller neighbouring country in a bid to end its drawn out ethnic conflict. — AFP photo

Thousands flood Damascus to say goodbye to Assad

DAMASCUS, June 12: Hundreds of thousands of Syrians flooded the capital today as it prepared to bid a final farewell to the only president they have known in 30 years, Hafez al-Assad, with a formal funeral attended by foreign dignitaries.

Assad, who died Saturday aged 69, will however be buried in a popular ceremony in his hometown of Qardaha, 300 km north of Damascus.

By midday Monday nine heads of state had announced their intention of attending the funeral, but only one -- French President Jacques Chirac -- is from a western nation.

Western leaders have hesitated between the chance of sizing up Assad's son and designating successor Bashir, and being seen to pay respects at too high level to a man they criticised for his alleged support of terrorism and human rights abuses during his 30 year rule.

Assad's coffin, draped with the red, white and black Syrian flag with green stars, will be carried on the shoulders of pallbearers from his home in the Rawda residential neighbourhood of Damascus to the main Umayyad Square, which has been filled with mourners since Saturday.

But instead of an elaborate procession around this main Damascus landmark, as in

initially reported by the official SANA news agency on Sunday, the body will be taken on a gun carriage to the People's Palace, SANA said later.

Assad used to receive his foreign guests in the white-marbled fortress-like palace, known in Arabic as Qasr al-Shaab, that sits atop the Qasyun hill which commands Damascus.

The casket will be displayed for five hours in Qasr al-Shaab, where foreign dignitaries will pay their last respects.

Assad's son Bashir, who has been designated by the ruling Baath Party to succeed the late president, will receive official condolences at the palace.

At 3:00 p.m. (1800 BST) Assad's body will be flown to the northern coastal city of Lattakia on its way to its final resting place in the family plot at Qardaha for burial.

Hundreds of thousands of mourners are expected to line the 30-kilometer highway between Lattakia and Qardaha, where Assad will be buried most probably beside his eldest son Basil, who died in a car crash in 1994 and has a mausoleum in the village.

So far only half-a-dozen Arab heads of state have said they will be present to say goodbye to a man who ruled Syria with an iron grip for 30 years

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Solomons govt asks rebels to lay down arms

HONIARA, June 12: The Solomon Islands government threatened today to call off a parliamentary no-confidence vote later this week if rebels controlling the capital did not return stolen police weapons, reports Reuters.

The government brokered the release of Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu on Friday on condition parliament would be recalled on Thursday for a vote of confidence in his government.

But a senior government minister told Reuters parliament might not meet if the Malaita Eagles Force did not return weapons stolen from the police armoury last week.

There have been meetings about arrangements for parliament on Thursday and in the current environment there is some question about whether it will happen, said Minister for State Alfred Sasako.

It depends on whether the arms are still in the hands of militants, and if there is an at-

mosphere of safety and if members can vote without fear of being under duress.

Eagles Force leader Andrew Nori had told a Commonwealth ministerial delegation on Saturday that all the weapons stolen from the police armoury last week would be returned before Thursday's planned parliamentary sitting.

The Commonwealth delegation is also tasked with trying to find a solution in Fiji. 1,400 miles to the southeast, where gunmen have been holding that nation's prime minister and most of his cabinet since May 19.

The foreign ministers' delegation will meet Fiji's recently installed military government on June 16, a Fijian military spokesman said on Saturday.

The Solomons capital Honiara was calm on Monday as a two-week truce held for a fourth day. The Commonwealth nation was officially on holiday to mark the birthday of Britain's Queen Elizabeth.

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BRIEFLY

US jets hit northern Iraq: US fighter jets bombed northern Iraq Monday after coming under Iraqi fire during routine patrols over the no-fly zone in the region, the US military said, AFP reports from Ankara.

The aircraft "dropped ordnance on elements of the Iraqi integrated air defence system" after Iraqi forces fired artillery from a site northeast of Mosul, the Stuttgart-based US European Command said in a statement received here.

Malaysian FM to meet Estrada: Malaysia's Foreign Minister said on Monday that he planned to meet with Philippines President Joseph Estrada in Manila this week to convey his government's concern over the prolonged hostage crisis, reports AP from Kuala Lumpur.

Six killed in sectarian violence in Indonesia

JAKARTA, June 12: At least six people, including two police officers, were killed Monday in fresh Muslim-Christian fighting in Maluku, a strife-torn province in eastern Indonesia, officials and witnesses said, reports AP.

In the provincial capital, Ambon, an official at the main Al Fatah Mosque, Malik Selang, said four Muslims were killed in a clash with a Christian gang at Hati Kecil, a village on the outskirts of Ambon, Maluku's capital.

A doctor at Ambon's navy hospital, Lt Jante, said two policemen had also died of gunshot wounds.

Witnesses said a number of Christians were also killed.

An official at a state-run hospital, said seven people were being treated there for injuries. One was in critical condition.

Troops supported by armored cars dispersed the two rival groups, who had attacked each other with spears and arrows.

Maluku is one of the few regions in Muslim-dominated Indonesia where Christians are the majority.

It had been renowned for its religious tolerance before sectarian violence broke out in January 1999.

More than 2,500 people have killed in Maluku, also known as the Moluccas Islands.



The youngest mountaineer Temba Chiri got frost bite while ascending Everest. Temba's three fingers of right hand and two of left hand were amputated on Sunday at a private hospital in the outskirts of Kathmandu.

— AFP photo

Youngest Everest climber loses five fingers

KATHMANDU, June 12: Nearly three weeks after his return from within 20 metres of Mount Everest's summit, 14-year-old Temba Chiribing had five of his frost-bitten fingers amputated, mountaineering sources said today, reports AFP.

Temba's five fingers were amputated on Sunday, while his parents waited outside the operating theatre of a private hospital in the outskirts of Kathmandu.

Temba, a seventh-grade student, set a record for being the youngest climber to cross the Hillary Steps at 8,828 metres (28,959 feet) on May 21, -- just 20 metres (66 feet) short of the summit of the world's tallest mountain -- but was forced to descend due to bad weather.

Temba had taken off his gloves to tie his bootlace and up his crampon, before setting out on his final leg from South Col camp, at 7,895 metres (26,194 ft) without realising the consequences, organisers said.

At the time of his return, Temba said he was more disappointed about not reaching the summit than losing his fingers, and plans to attempt the climb again.

Quake jolts Taiwan

TAIPEI, June 12: An earthquake measuring 5.0 on the Richter scale jolted central Taiwan early today in the ninth major aftershock to follow a strong tremor which left two dead and 36 injured, seismologists said, reports AFP.

The quake struck at 4:11 a.m. (0211 BST).

Radioactive mail sent to Japanese PM's office

TOKYO, June 12: An unknown attacker sent a letter containing radioactive powder to the office of Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, officials said today, reports AFP.

"We are aware of the crime and are investigating it," said a National Police Agency spokesman.

"We cannot disclose details at the moment as the investigation is still under way," he said.

Separate envelopes were sent to the prime minister's office and six other government offices between June 6 and 8, Chief Cabinet Secretary Mikio Aoki said.

The other offices were the Education Ministry, the Agency of Natural Resources and Energy, Home Affairs Ministry, Public Security Investigation Agency, Science and Technology Agency and Defense Agency, he said.

The National Police Agency and National Public Safety Commission reportedly also received the envelopes.

The envelopes, believed to have been sent by the same person, contained letters and about three grams (0.0105 ounces) of material, including radioactive powder, he told a news conference.

"I heard its radioactivity was

about one microsievert. This cannot pose a direct danger as our daily exposure to radioactivity in natural circumstances is several microsieverts," Aoki said.

The government alerted all ministers after the crime was discovered but it kept the affair from the public for fear of provoking confusion and triggering copycat crimes, he said.

The substance was believed to be monazite, a mineral containing thorium that can be used as nuclear fuel, Jiji Press news agency said.

One letter accused a named Japanese person of "exporting uranium to North Korea," the agency said, without giving further details.

The prime minister's deputy press secretary, Kazuhiko Koshikawa, confirmed that a suspect envelope had arrived at Mori's office but said police had yet to inform him of their investigation.

"We received an envelope containing sand- or powder-like material," Koshikawa told AFP.

Further details were being withheld during the investigation, Koshikawa said.

The envelope was opened by an official in the prime minister's office, who had not undergone health checks, he said.

Britain's royal family losing popularity

LONDON, June 12: Britain's royal family is losing its lustre in the eyes of an increasingly indifferent public, a new poll showed today, reports Reuters.

Only 44 per cent of those polled by ICM for the Guardian newspaper thought Britain would be worse off if the monarchy was abolished -- the lowest rating in modern times and well off the 70 per cent levels of the early 1990s.

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Despite questions about the relevance of the monarchy in a 21st century world, all from Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mother -- to heirs to the thrown Prince Charles and his sons William and Harry are seen as major tourist attractions.

They also provide a steady stream of page-filling stories

Korean summit begins today

SEOUL, June 12: After a last-minute delay, President Kim Dae-Jung of South Korea will go to Pyongyang on Tuesday in an attempt to lay the foundations for a permanent peace with the Stalinist North, reports AFP.

His meeting with the North's Kim Jong-Il will be the first between the leaders of the Cold War enemies since the Korean peninsula was divided in 1945.

Secretive North Korea asked for a 24-hour delay in the start of Kim Dae-Jung's three-day visit on Saturday night.

But the South Korean government said Monday there had been no new surprises. There were more frantic meetings at the presidential Blue House to prepare Kim Dae-Jung's historic visit that will have worldwide repercussions.

The president will fly to Pyongyang with a delegation of about 180 people, including 50 journalists.

The two Kims will hold private meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday, when there will also be a general meeting with

ministers and officials. Under the new schedule, Kim Dae-Jung will go to Pyongyang on Tuesday through the truce village of Panmunjom in the De-Militarised Zone.

Among the break-the-ice moments will be an exchange of dogs between the leaders and a visit by Kim Dae-Jung to a Pyongyang restaurant to eat the North's "cold noodles," a famed delicacy.

The South Korean leader has said he will raise all issues "without fear" with his reclusive and elusive North Korean counterpart, who appears to have decided to open a chunk of light to the outside world.

The West is worried about the North's suspected nuclear arms programme.

The United States has welcomed the holding of the summit but remains wary. Washington, in particular, wants to make sure the Koreas make no move to end the presence of its 37,000 troops in the South.



South Korean members of the National Assembly set candles on a map of Korea to pray for success of the summit between South and North Korea, at the National Assembly in Seoul yesterday. The landmark summit between North and South Korea, due to start on June 12, has been delayed by one day at the request of the North, presidential spokesman said Sunday. — AFP photo

Bangladesh Shilpa Bank Head Office, Dhaka Law Department-2 Sale Notice

Mortgaged Assets of M/s Zahed Wire & Allied Industries Ltd, Bogra

Steel re-rolling & wire drawing project having a rated plant capacity of 30,000 tons of MS Rod, Tor steel, GI wire and nail wire etc.

Mortgaged land, building and machinery of M/s Zahed Wire & Allied Industries Ltd, Bogra will be sold by the Bangladesh Shilpa Bank (BSB) on cash payment and on "as-is-where-is" basis for realising BSB's arrear loan and dues of Tk 4545.83 lacs as on 31-12-98 plus additional interest and other expenses until realisation of this amount from the above company and its directors as per Article 34 of BSB Order, 1972 (PO No 129/72) read with BSB (direct sale of mortgaged property) Rules, 1980.

2. Bangladesh Shilpa Bank will not assume any legal obligation whatsoever on behalf of the company and/or its directors in respect of any dues/claims of government and/or autonomous bodies such as WASA, local Municipality, Electric and Gas Supply Authority, Land Revenue and other creditors.

3. The following persons are the directors of the company

a) Mr Md Zahed Ali Director
b) Mr Md Zainul Alam Director
c) Mr Md Azizur Rahman Director
Khandaker

d) Mrs Latifa Alam Ara Director

4. Schedule of property: