

International

German tourist feared killed in India's Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, July 26: A German tourist who was abducted by Muslim militants in the troubled Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir earlier this month is believed to have been killed, a local government official said today, reports Reuters.

"We have intelligence reports that the German tourist was killed on the higher reaches of a mountainous range between Kargil and Doda," said a state government official who declined to be identified.

"We said the body of the tourist had not been found.

The Asian Age newspaper, quoting unidentified sources, said the German had been shot dead by the ringleader of the militants the day after his abduction.

Officials at the German embassy in New Delhi were not immediately available for comments.

India not against dialogue with Pakistan'

NEW DELHI, July 26: India yesterday said it was not against having a dialogue with Pakistan but made it clear that Islamabad had to create the right and conducive atmosphere for any meaningful talks, reports PTI.

We are not against dialogue, a foreign office spokesman told reporters adding Pakistan has to create the right atmosphere for a meaningful dialogue.

He was responding to questions on how New Delhi viewed the G-8 nations asking India and Pakistan to resume their stalled dialogue as soon as possible. The G-8 had also noted at their meeting in Nago, Japan, that prolonged tension between the two remained a cause of international concern.

They also appealed to the two countries to join international efforts to strengthen non-proliferation and disarmament, regime and sign and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Kashmiri militants unitedly reject ceasefire offer

Hezb-ul Mujahideen expelled from United Jihad Council

ISLAMABAD, July 26: An umbrella organisation, representing 14 guerrilla groups fighting in Indian Kashmir, today rejected a unilateral ceasefire offer made by a fellow rebel group, reports AP.

The United Jihad Council issued a statement at a news conference in the Pakistani capital calling a unilateral ceasefire offer by Hezb-ul Mujahideen a sellout and promising to fight on.

The council also suspended Hezb-ul Mujahideen's membership in the organisation and dismissed its chief, who had been co-chairman.

"We will continue our jihad (holy war). We cannot support a ceasefire that will strengthen India and push Kashmiris closer toward slavery," said the statement. Representatives of the 13 groups attended the news conference, but they refused to field questions.

Successive guerrilla groups have spoken out against the

ceasefire offer since Monday when it was made by Hezb-ul Mujahideen.

The Indian government has welcomed the offer and said it is ready to talk with the guerrilla group. However, the ceasefire offer by Hezb-ul Mujahideen comes with a stipulation that India ends its crackdown on militants and cease human rights violations.

The guerrilla group has given India one week to comply. It's not clear how the organisation will decide whether there conditions have been met.

Militant Muslim groups have been battling Indian soldiers in Indian-ruled Kashmir for more than one decade demanding either outright independence or union with Islamic Pakistan.

A former princely state, Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan after British rule of the Asian subcontinent ended in 1947. Both Pakistan and India lay claim to a united Kashmir.

2 Indians share Magsaysay Award

MANILA, July 26: Indian activists Aruna Roy and Jackin Arputham have won this year's Ramon Magsaysay award along with a former Philippine Town Mayor, a Chinese environmentalist and a former Indonesian journalist, the award body said, reports AFP.

Roy and Arputham won the award for community leadership and international understanding, respectively. Roy heads a peasant workers' group while Arputham founded a slum dwellers' association.

The award for government service went to Jesse Robredo, a former mayor of Naga City in the Philippines for his effective city management while yielding power to the people.

Liang Congle, who founded China's first environmental group Friends of Nature, won the Prize for public service for pioneering his country's environmental movement.

China for Afghan coalition govt

ISLAMABAD, July 26: Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan yesterday called for "cooled-headed" dialogue between the warring parties in Afghanistan to create a coalition government and end more than 20 years of war, reports AFP.

Speaking after talks with Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf at the end of his four-day visit to India and Pakistan, Tang also said the festering Kashmir dispute could only be resolved through dialogue, "he said.

All parties to the Afghan conflict including the Taliban should sit together and explore in a cool-headed fashion, ways to arrive at consensus through dialogue and negotiation, "he said.

The negotiations should aim at the "formation of a new coalition government acceptable to all parties and endorsed by the international community," he said.



Palestinian protesters wave their guns during an anti-Israel demonstration held in the West Bank town of Nablus on Tuesday, after the failure of the Israeli Palestinian peace summit in Camp David.

-AFP photo

DPRK's meeting on Asian security lauded

BANGKOK, July 26: North Korea's foray into the intricate waters of international diplomacy at an Asian security forum here is a crucial first step towards easing tension on the Korean peninsula, analysts say, reports AFP.

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problems, of lack of confidence, of lack of security and stability, in Northeast Asia and the Korean peninsula will be here together," Surin said.

Tensions on the Korean peninsula and concerns over North Korea's nuclear weapons development have been high on the agenda of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) since it began its annual dialogue in 1994.

ARF covers ASEAN members Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam and their dialogue partners Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, North Korea, Papua New Guinea, Russia, South Korea, and the United States.

Australian PM Howard hints at retirement

SYDNEY, July 26: Australian Prime Minister John Howard said today he could retire from politics after the next election, due late next year, reports AFP.

Speaking on his 61st birthday, Howard confessed he was not indispensable to the ruling Liberal Party and waxed philosophical about life, family and the future.

"I don't have the view that I am so indispensable and so important and so vital without me, that is an arrogant view," he told ABC radio.

However he said he was in good health, "and I'm applying myself to the job very effectively and I'm enjoying it."

If the party wants me to lead it to another election, which would be at the end of next year, I'd be happy to do so," he said. "After that, then one has to recognise that I'll then be in my 63rd or 64th year and nothing is forever."

Fiji government on hold again

Appointment of new cabinet postponed

SUVA, July 26: Fiji President Josefa Iloilo today postponed the appointment of a new interim government for the second time in a week because of fears of a backlash from nationalist rebels who overthrew the previous administration, reports AFP.

The Pacific nation has been in political turmoil since the rebels stormed parliament on May 19 and took the former government hostage, and effectively without any sort of government since the military lifted martial law on July 13.

A new interim administration, charged with organising elections within two years, had initially been due to take office last Thursday. But a swearing-in ceremony was cancelled at the last minute after coup leader George Speight threatened civil war if the new administration did not include more of his supporters.

The rebels are demanding that Samanunu Cakobau, Fiji's High Commissioner to Malaysia, is named as prime minister, and that they are given five of the top government portfolios.

But diplomatic sources told AFP that, despite today's fresh delay, Iloilo, who is 79 and frail, planned to stick with his original nominee, Laisenia Qarase, a banker who enjoys the backing of the country's military but is fiercely opposed by Speight.

Diplomats fear that Speight, faced with defeat, may launch a second coup, just as occurred in 1987 when army强人 Sitiveni Rabuka had to follow his first coup with a second one in the face of the same kind of indecision being seen here currently.

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