

International

Koreas to reopen liaison offices, peace talks

SEOUL, July 31 : North and South Korea took another step on the long road towards reconciliation today by agreeing to reopen liaison offices in no-man's land dividing the peninsula and to hold a new round of peace talks, reports AFP.

The two sides announced the measures on Monday, together with plans to hold a national reconciliation week, in a joint statement following ministerial level talks in Seoul over the weekend.

The talks -- the first time a North Korean delegation has visited the South since 1992 -- were organised to follow up the joint declaration agreed at the June 13-15 Inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang.

"On the occasion of the 15th of August, 2000, the South and North shall resume the

operations of the South-North liaison office at Panmunjom," said the statement.

The liaison offices were set up in 1992 after the last major peace initiative on the peninsula, which has been divided into Communist North and pro-Western South since 1945, but the North withdrew in 1996 and since then the only contact has been through Red Cross societies.

The truce village of Panmunjom is the only meeting point between the two Koreas and is controlled by US-led United Nations troops.

The statement said the two sides agreed to hold new talks from August 29-31 in Pyongyang, and to hold reconciliation events to coincide with the August 15 Liberation Day marking the end of Japanese colonial rule.

Maskhadov seriously wounded

MOSCOW, July 31 : Separatist Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and his top field commander Shamil Basayev were both seriously wounded several months ago, Interfax cited top paratrooper General Georgy Shpak as saying, reports AFP.

"Soon" by Russian forces that attacked the separatist leaders.

A spokesman for the Chechen president, Arbi Saldov, contacted by telephone from an undisclosed location in Chechnya flatly denied the claim.

The Kremlin meanwhile said was not immediately issue any comment on the report, saying that it was checking into the information.

Maskhadov had been previously reported injured by Russian General Gennady Troshev on June 6.

Lankan general locked up again over murders

COLOMBO, July 31 : A Sri Lankan court today ordered the removal of a retired army general for two more weeks pending police investigations into allegations that he ordered the slaughter of left-wing rebels, officials said, reports AFP.

The magistrates courts in the north central town of Anuradhapura asked retired major general Ananda Weerasekara and two soldiers to be kept in custody for two weeks, court officials said after Monday's hearing.

Delhi, Nagaland rebels agree to truce, political solution

BANGKOK, July 31 : Indian government officials and exiled tribal rebel leaders meeting here have agreed to extend the ceasefire in the northeastern state of Nagaland and "bring about a lasting political solution" to the 50-year insurgency in the region, rebel sources said today, reports AFP.

Before the peace talks, Indian officials told AFP that the existing ceasefire had become a total farce, with the (NSCN) militants violating the truce and indulging in killings, kidnapping, and extortion.

Former home secretary K. Padmanabhaiah led the Indian side at the talks in the Thai capital, while the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was represented by RH Raisingh, a

senior member of the rebels steering committee.

It was the first round of talks since NSCN general secretary Thuingaleng Muivah was arrested by Thai immigration officials in January at Bangkok airport.

The Naga separatist leader was sentenced to a one-year jail term for trying to jump bail and attempting to enter Thailand with forged travel documents.

Muivah's status reportedly was not discussed during the India-NSCN talks in Bangkok.

The rebel group has been fighting for an independent Naga homeland since India's independence in 1947.

Militants attack army camp in Kashmir: 6 troops killed

SRINAGAR, India, July 31 : Muslim militants in Kashmir have shot and killed six Indian soldiers and injured seven others in an attack on an army camp, police officials said today, reports AFP.

The attack took place overnight Sunday on a transit camp near the town of Bandipur, some 50 km north of the Kashmiri capital Srinagar.

It was the first major militant operation against a military compound since the top Kashmiri militant group Hizbul Mujahideen declared a unilateral ceasefire one week ago, prompting an offer of peace talks from the Indian government.

The gunmen came down from the surrounding hills a little after midnight and strafed the camp with rockets and automatic weapons fire," a local police official told AFP by phone.

He said the attackers fled in the dark and added that a massive manhunt had been launched to find the rebels.

The camp belonged to one of the army's elite counter-insurgency outfits, the 15th Rashtriya Rifles.

Meanwhile, suspected Muslim militants carried out separate attacks against the security forces in Srinagar on Monday.

One policeman was killed and two injured in a shooting incident in a congested market area in central Srinagar. Police reinforcements rushed to the scene and cordoned off the area before launching a search operation for the gunmen.

In downtown Srinagar, three policemen and one civilian was injured when suspected militants lobbed a grenade into a security bunker.

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An FMF spokesman in the capital Suva said they were "hopeful" the occupation would be resolved before then. "I can assure you that talks are going on and we are very hopeful," he said.

Meanwhile, the first of 360 arrested coup supporters appeared in Suva court and were all granted 50 Fijian dollars (25 US dollars) bail.

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