

Indian Army accused of failing to evict Pakistani forces from Kargil

Islamabad rejects reports

NEW DELHI, Aug 31 : The Indian Army was facing mounting criticism Thursday over allegations that up to six frontier peaks in northern Kashmir remained under Pakistani occupation following last year's Kargil border conflict, reports AFP.

The controversy, which erupted after newspapers reported that a strategic peak, Point 5353, was still being held by the Pakistani army, snowballed Wednesday when a parliamentarian claimed that five other Indian peaks were also in Islamabad's control.

The army has not yet reacted to the allegations.

India celebrated its first "Victory Day" in July to commemorate the end of the 10-week conflict in Kashmir's Kargil region, which saw Indian troops push back Pakistani-backed militia from key mountain posts on the Indian side of the border.

The mass incursion over the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir caught India un-

awares and triggered a vicious battle -- fought mainly in severe, high altitude conditions -- that claimed more than 1,000 lives on both sides.

The conflict caused grave concern within the international community, coming as it did one year after India and Pakistan conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests.

On Wednesday, Ram Kumar Anand, a member of the Indian parliament and a prominent lawyer, said five other peaks apart from Point 5353 -- Point Attab-1, Point Saddle Bridge, Point Bunker Ridge, Shangruti and Daulana -- were still in Pakistani hands.

Anand, who is defending an army colonel transferred for incompetence at the start of last year's conflict, said several top army officials had bungled during the crisis but got away scot-free.

The army chief General Ved Prakash Malhotra was in Poland the corps commander Lieutenant General Krishan Pal was playing golf in the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar and

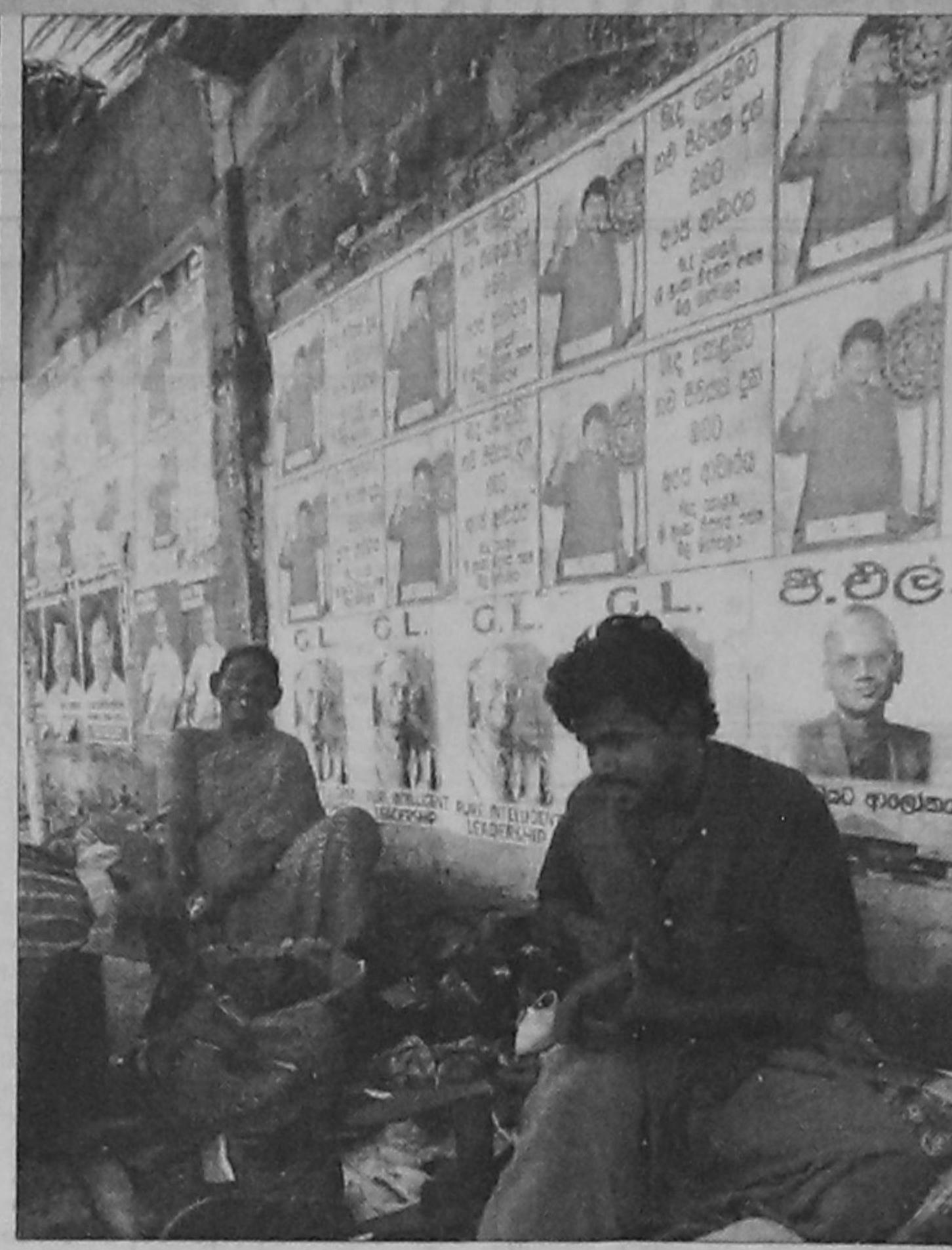
the Director General of Military Intelligence lieutenant general Ravi Sawhney, with an intelligence fund of 1.1 billion rupees (25,977 dollars), was not doing his job, he said.

Anand said Point 5353 was of great strategic importance as the Pakistani army got a clear view of a crucial Indian military helipad as well as the arterial highway linking Srinagar to Kashinur's Ladakh region.

The Indian army could see 40 kilometres (25 miles) inside Pakistani territory when they held that peak, he said.

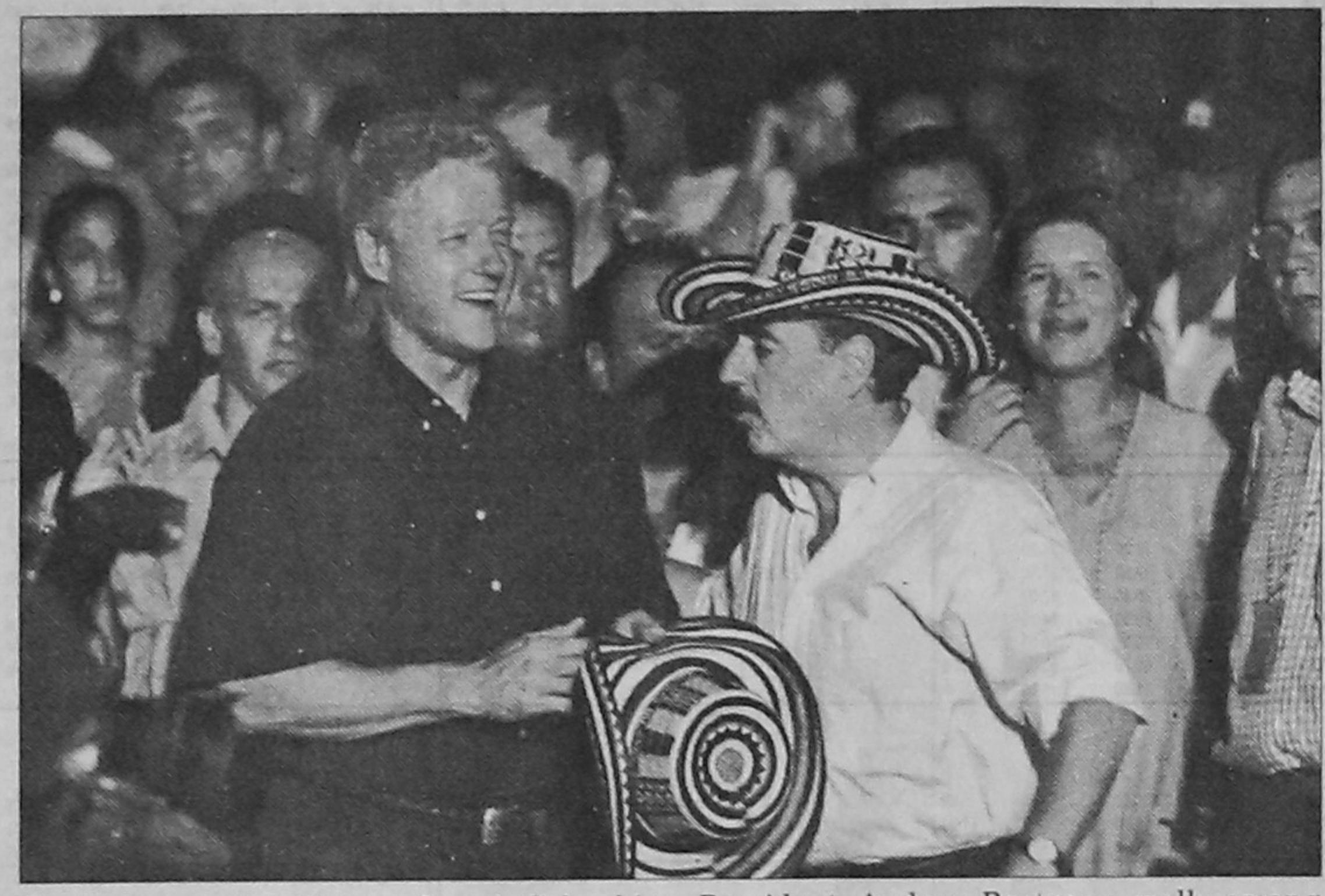
Meanwhile, Pakistan today rejected reports from India that its troops were occupying some border peaks in Kargil region on the Indian side of the disputed Kashmir.

"We respect the LoC which is a temporary line pending the settlement of the Kashmir dispute," Khan added.



A Sri Lankan cobbler mends a shoe on the pavements of the capital Colombo yesterday in front of a wall plastered with election posters. At least three people have been killed in election-related violence and Buddhist monks have appealed to all political parties to act with restraint and prevent further clashes.

— AFP photo



US President Bill Clinton (L) and Colombian President Andres Pastrana walk among cultural street scenes late Wednesday in downtown Cartagena, Colombia. Clinton visited Colombia with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, US Attorney General Janet Reno, US Drug Enforcement Czar General Barry McCaffrey, and leading members of the US Congress, to support "Plan Colombia", Colombia's anti-drug campaign. — AFP photo

Clinton pledges support for Pastrana's anti-drug drive

CARTAGENA, Colombia, Aug 31 : President Andres Pastrana said he was "extraordinarily pleased" with his meeting with US President Bill Clinton, saying it boosted their "strategic alliance" against drug trafficking and for democracy, reports AFP.

"We got total support from the United States for Colombia's government and people, there's a bipartisan policy in fighting drug trafficking: we touched on the key issue of trade and President Clinton, I think, came away with a real image of Colombia, which is very important," Pastrana told reporters late Wednesday after Clinton returned to Washington.

During his brief, 10-hour visit here, Clinton pledged US support for Pastrana's anti-drug campaign and reassured

his audience that Colombia would not turn into another Vietnam for the United States.

"We are not going to get into a shooting war," Clinton declared.

"This is not Vietnam, neither is it Yankee imperialism," he added.

Clinton's visit marked the launching of Plan Colombia, an ambitious 7.5-billion-dollar package of economic and security measures designed to jump-start the country's economy, curb drug trafficking and end decades of leftist insurgency.

"I believe this will work because I think that this president and this government are willing to take the risks necessary to make it work," Clinton said after meeting Pastrana.

The United States has earmarked 1.3 billion dollars to back Plan Colombia. Part of the

money will be used to purchase 60 US combat helicopters and train Colombian troops involved in the campaign against drug cartels.

"Our program is anti-drug and pro-peace," assured Clinton, saying that in his talks with Pastrana he had reaffirmed US support for his peace process with Colombian rebels.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has warned that US military aid to Colombia "could result in the escalation of the conflict and Vietnamization of the entire area."

Clinton made clear he believed such comparisons were unjustified.

"There won't be American involvement in a shooting war, because they don't want it and because we don't want it," he told a news conference.

2 Pakistanis held for massacre of Sikhs' in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 31 : Indian police in Kashmir said today they had arrested two Pakistani Muslim militants for their alleged role in the massacre of 36 Sikhs in a village on March 21, reports AFP.

Police Inspector P.S. Gill said the two Pakistanis, identified as Abu Mohammad and Abu Sahar, were members of the Pakistan-based hardline Lashkar-e-Toiba militant group, which has also been blamed for massacring 35 Hindu pilgrims on August 1.

The Chatisinghpura village massacre, which marked the first major act of violence against Sikhs in Kashmir since the Muslim insurgency here began in 1989, took place on the eve of US President Bill Clinton's five-day visit to India.

"Taliban lose ground in Baghlan"

KABUL, Aug 31 : Afghan opposition groups today claimed they had captured hilltops overlooking the key district of Nahreen in northern Baghlan province in fighting with the ruling Taliban militia, reports AFP.

Forces loyal to opposition military supreme Ahmad Shah Masood captured 18 Taliban posts atop Yaka Archa mountain overlooking the twin old and new towns of Nahreen in a pre-dawn attack, they said.

Sierra Leone rebels free 5 British captives

FREETOWN, August 31 : A renegade militia group in Sierra Leone on Wednesday released five of the 11 British soldiers it was holding captive, British officials said, holding out hope that the remaining six would also be liberated soon.

"Five of the British soldiers being held have been released and are now in UK (United Kingdom) hands, they are safe and well," a British military spokesman in Freetown, Lieutenant Commander Tony Cramp, told AFP.

"We are delighted at this major development and clearly this augurs well for the release of the remaining detainees."

He would not say what, if any, conditions had been attached to the release.

He said much of the credit for the breakthrough goes to "the combined efforts of UNAMSIL (the UN force in Sierra Leone) and Jorbatt (the Jordanian UNAMSIL contingent).

In London, a spokesman for the Foreign Office confirmed the release of the five.

"They are in British hands," the spokesman said. "We are hopeful the others will be released soon. Negotiations will continue tomorrow for the release of the remaining detainees."

Quake jolts Taiwan: An earthquake measuring 4.3 on the Richter scale hit southern Taiwan Thursday, but there were no reports of casualties or damage, seismologists said, AFP reports from Taipei.

The quake struck at 11:06 a.m. (09:06 BST), with its epicentre 1.9 km northwest of southern Chiayi city. It originated 10.7 kilometers below the earth's surface.

On June 11, a quake with a magnitude of 6.7 hit central Taiwan, killing two people and injuring 36.

3 Iraqis hurt in air raids: Three Iraqis, including a child, were wounded on Wednesday in attacks by US and British warplanes on a village in the southern province of Muthanna, the press quoted a military spokesman as saying, AFP reports from Baghdad.

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BRIEFLY

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