

## India okays development of N-capable missile

AFP, New Delhi

India has approved the development of long-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile, capable of delivering a nuclear warhead into Pakistan and China, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said Thursday.

The news agency quoted defence minister Jaswant Singh as saying the Agni-II missile system was planned for induction during the year ending March 2002.

"Agni II is an operational missile system designed and developed using various technologies," Singh told a parliamentary committee.

Limited production of the surface-to-surface missile had begun after the successful test firing of an Agni-II on April 11, 1999 and January 17, 2001, which sparked strong criticism from arch-rival Pakistan.

The Agni-II has a range of around 2,500 kilometres and is a two-stage, all solid motor missile capable of carrying a one tonne nuclear warhead and being fired from a mobile launcher.

## Chemical factory blast kills 11 in India

AP, New Delhi

A powerful explosion ripped through a chemical factory in western India on Thursday, killing at least 11 workers and injuring 10 others, a news report said.

Police believe the blast was caused by a buildup of pressure in the factory's main boiler, the Press Trust of India news agency said.

Thirty-five workers were on the night shift when the explosion took place at the Exogel India Ltd. factory in Pune, a city 70 miles southeast of Bombay, police officer Sridhar Pandurang Jadhav was quoted as saying.

The factory makes guanidine nitrate, which is used in chemical explosives.

Jadhav was quoted as saying that there was no evidence of sabotage.

## 3m Chinese drink urine to keep fit

AFP, Beijing

More than three million Chinese drink their own urine in order to live healthier and longer lives, state media reported yesterday.

One of them is Zhu Jinfu, a 71-year-old senior engineer from the eastern city of Nanjing, who has been drinking his own urine since he was 13, the Xinhua news agency said.

Zhu told 300 participants at an academic seminar held this week in northeastern Liaoning province that he got the idea from his ancestors, who had enjoyed great longevity due to their drinking habits.

Yang Liansheng, a professor from the Liaoning Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine, was quoted by Xinhua as trying to give a scientific explanation of the alleged benefits of drinking urine.

"Urine is turned into something like blood serum after it is filtered by the kidney," he said. "Therefore, urine contains no bacteria and is more sanitary than blood."

# Wahid fires security minister, reshuffles cabinet

AFP, Jakarta

A beleaguered but defiant Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid yesterday threatened action against parliament, sacked his security minister and attorney general in a cabinet reshuffle and refused to resign.

Opponents said the increasingly-isolated Muslim cleric was committing political suicide and acting out of desperation to avoid almost-certain impeachment by the national assembly on August 1.

In a defiant early morning speech to 1945 independence veterans Wahid said: "I will not resign. If the existence of this country is threatened I won't hesitate to take firm actions."

"It's not that I don't want to resign. I can't," he said, a day after the national assembly set August 1 as the date for a special session to demand Wahid account for his erratic time in office.

Wahid's defence minister Mohammad Mahfud survived the reshuffle, which saw chief security minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Attorney General Marzuki Dariusman kicked.

But Mahfud threatened to resign if a state of emergency was declared by the embattled president.

"I would propose finding a new defence minister who has the heart and the strength to carry out repressive action, because a decree would require that kind of person, not someone like me," he said.

Yudhoyono, a retired general who has repeatedly warned Wahid against imposing a state of emergency, told a press conference in his office he expected heads in the military to roll too.

"I was told that he will replace the chief of the police and so far I have no information whether he will also replace the TNI (military) chief and other senior leaders in the military."

Police chief Suroyo Bimantoro later confirmed he was "non-active" but it remained unclear whether he was fired or had resigned.

"These changes are intended to improve the effectiveness and coordination of the running of the government," presidential spokesman Yahya Staquif said in a televised announcement.

Wahid said his sprawling nation risked disintegrating if he resigned, with six provinces including the restive regions of Aceh and Irian Jaya likely to declare independence.

MPs and analysts warned that if Wahid translated "firm actions" into his oft-repeated threat to declare a state of emergency and dissolve parliament the move would backfire.

Alvin Lie, deputy parliamentary leader of the anti-Wahid Reform faction, said lawmakers would fight back.

"If he issues a decree, I am very, very sure that the moment he issues that decree he will be put under house detention by the police," Lie told AFP, adding the military would refuse to back any emergency declaration.

International Crisis Group analyst Harold Crouch agreed the move could prove politically fatal for Wahid, who in October 1999 became Indonesia's first freely elected president.

"I would never rule it out but he would be crazy to do it; he'd be cutting his own throat... it's pointless without the military's support," Crouch said.



Supporters of Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid sit in front of a police barricade while listening their fellow's speech during a demonstration outside the presidential palace in Jakarta yesterday. Over one thousand supporters staged a mass rally demanding that Wahid declare a decree, disbanding parliament.



Palestinians hang national flags outside Orient House, the unofficial headquarters of the PLO in occupied east Jerusalem, yesterday following the death of Jerusalem's top Palestinian official Faisal al-Husseini. Husseini, 60, died of a heart attack in the morning while on a visit to Kuwait.

## Israeli, Palestinian press hail Hussein as man of peace

AFP, Jerusalem

Israelis and Palestinians managed to agree on one thing yesterday, as newspapers from both sides paid tribute to senior PLO official Faisal Hussein, who died in Kuwait a day earlier.

Faisal Hussein was a true Palestinian, the son of a great aristocratic family... which, despite its historical roots always found the words to touch the Israelis' hearts", the Israeli daily Maariv said in its editorial.

And in an article he published in Israel's top-selling Yediot Aharonot, Israeli Labour official Yossi Beilin described Hussein as "a Palestinian nationalist who expressed the voice of sanity in his camp."

"For many Israelis, Faisal Hussein was a bone in their throat. Having said that, in the situation we are in today, with the ongoing nightmare of violence overwhelming the voices of sanity, Faisal Hussein will be a voice that they will also be missing", said the former minister and architect of the 1993 Oslo accords.

## US fears Pak nuclear proliferation

REUTERS, London

The United States is concerned that Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme is not under adequate control and fears it could be spreading nuclear capabilities to other states, notably North Korea, the Financial Times reported yesterday.

It quoted Richard Armitage, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, as saying in an interview that the United States had "concerns of proliferation with Pakistan".

They centred on "people who were employed by the nuclear agency and have retired", Armitage said.

He declined to elaborate on the evidence he said the United States had for the assertion.

The Financial Times reported that other officials said there had been contacts between North Korean officials and senior figures in the Pakistani nuclear establishment.

## Nine killed in fireworks explosion in Pakistan

AFP, Lahore

At least nine people were killed and eight others wounded yesterday when a clandestine fireworks manufacturing workshop blew up in a residential area of the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore, police said.

The massive explosion caused severe damage to surrounding houses and panic among the residents of the thickly populated Pir Makki town in the central part of the city.

"It destroyed the building in which the illegal workshop was working and damaged walls of several adjoining houses," deputy inspector general of police Javed Noor told AFP.

He said several people were living in the government-owned building, which had been reduced to rubble.

Six bodies were initially recovered from the rubble but police officer Arshad Mahmood said three more had been found as rescue workers dug deeper through the debris.

Stocks at the factory were pre-

sumed to be large ahead of festivities to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Mohammad on June 5.

The old part of the city is known to have dozens of fireworks factories despite laws banning them from residential areas.

Witnesses said the explosion was so powerful it tore away the double-storey building's roof, which flew several meters in the air before it fell over an adjacent house and killed a 70-year-old man.

Mohammad Asim, a shopkeeper in the area, said he was about to open his grocery store when the explosions rocked the vicinity.

"I saw a thick smoke of dust and stones were flying all around me," he said.

He said he immediately threw himself on the ground thinking that a bomb had exploded.

Police said the building had been rented by a painter who secretly ran the fireworks shop.

"Most of the victims were his workers who were making the fireworks," Noor said, adding that the painter had been arrested.

## Philippines army, kidnappers clash: Two soldiers dead

AFP, Basilan, Philippines

A jungle gunfight erupted yesterday as Philippine troops caught up with Abu Sayyaf guerrillas holding 20 hostages on the southern island of Basilan, leaving two soldiers dead and 14 wounded, officials said.

Abu Sabaya, a spokesman for the Muslim rebels, said two of the hostages were wounded in the fighting. Military officials said the claim was likely misinformation.

Sabaya renewed a threat to slaughter the three American and 17 Filipino captives they took from a resort off western Palawan island on Sunday.

The Americans were US missionary couple Martin and Gracia Burnham of Kansas and Californian Guillermo Sobrero.

Military spokesman Brigadier General Edilberto Adan said two soldiers were killed and 14 wounded when an army patrol ran into an Abu

Sayyaf encampment. There was no word on possible casualties among the rebels.

"The defence perimeter of this kidnapping group for the temporary base that they have established must have been breached by our troops scouring the area for the past four days," Adan told reporters in Manila.

The three-hour firefight was the first contact between government troops and the kidnappers, who fled to the south by boat across a 480 km expanse of the Sulu Sea after seizing tourists in the upmarket resort of Dos Palmas.

Sabaya claimed his group arrived in Basilan on Thursday night.

Adan said troops and air support units are being rushed to cordon off a 180 square-kilometre area north-east of Mount Sinangkapan, while naval vessels were ordered to quarantine the 1,300 square-

kilometre island.

With the sound of gunfire ringing in the background, Sabaya said by satellite telephone to a local radio station that troops "opened fire on the Abu Sayyaf and the hostages (who were) bathing and swimming in the river."

He also put on air one of the women hostages, Teresa Ganzon.

"Please refrain from this military action that has made us so afraid. These encounters are going to cost us our lives," she said.

Manila brushed off her appeal.

"We are not thinking of a cessation of hostilities here. We want to maintain contact with this terrorist group so they cannot escape," Adan said.

President Gloria Arroyo's spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao said Manila has appointed intermediaries if the rebels wanted to surrender or free the hostages.

## Peace with Pakistan on right track: Advani

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, the cabinet number two, said Thursday Pakistan's positive response to India's invitation to talks had set them on the right course for peace.

Advani spoke favourably of the correspondence between the Indian premier and Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

"Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's letter to him (Musharraf) and his positive response to it indicates that talks will begin and we shall make good progress," Advani was quoted by the Press Trust of India as saying.

He was addressing a ceremony of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force in Indian-ruled Kashmir at Leh, 400 kilometres from the state capital Srinagar.

Advani, however, promised there would be no let up in tackling militancy in Kashmir, where more than 35,000 people have died since 1989 in an insurgency in the Muslim-majority state.

"There will be no relaxation in our security measures against militants," he said.

In his response to Vajpayee's invitation, Musharraf said he wanted to "overcome the legacy of distrust" between the South Asian rivals.

He said the nuclear neighbours' decades-old dispute over Kashmir was the fundamental cause of tension and needed to be discussed candidly along with "all other outstanding issues".

Vajpayee said Wednesday he was satisfied by Musharraf's reply.

The proposed Indo-Pakistan peace summit in New Delhi is unlikely to take place before mid-July because of Vajpayee's upcoming knee operation, cabinet spokesman Pramod Mahajan said.

## Fossils of giant dinosaur found in Egypt

AP, Washington

Ninety-four million years ago, part of what is now the Sahara desert was a lush tropical home for a long-necked dinosaur that may have been the second largest land animal ever.

Researchers led by Joshua B. Smith of the University of Pennsylvania found fossilised remains of the gargantuan animal near an Egyptian desert oasis, scene of other notable dinosaur finds.

Smith and his colleagues identified the monster, which they say weighed more than 60 tons, as a Sauropod, a type of plant-eater, and named it Paralititan stromeri. Paralititan means "tidal giant." Stromeri refers to Ernst Stromer, a geologist who found dinosaur fossils in the area in the 1930s and took them to Germany where they were destroyed by Allied bombing in World War II.

The new discovery was to be published Friday in the journal Science.

"This tells us we had really, really big (plant-eating dinosaurs) hanging out on the coast of North Africa back then," said Smith.

He said it was known that Africa had at least three very large predators living some 90 million years ago, but until now scientists were puzzled where those massive meat-eaters got their food.

"Now we've found a 60-ton steak that they were eating," said Smith.

Only a few fossilised bones were found at the site, but Smith said they were enough to calculate the size of

Paralititan. The key was finding the right humerus, a bone in the four-legged animal that corresponds to the upper arm bone in humans. The bone was 51/2 feet long.

By comparing that humerus to the more complete skeletons of other Sauropods, Smith said his team could estimate the size of Paralititan.

The animal was 80 to 100 feet long, from its nose to the tip of its long and powerful tail, and it weighed 60 to 70 tons, he said.

That size puts Paralititan second only to Argentinosaurus, a Sauropod discovered in South America that has been estimated to have been 90 feet long and to have weighed about 90 tons.

"Paralititan is in the same family as Argentinosaurus," said Smith. "They are closely related."

At the time the two giants lived, Africa and South America had only recently split apart, moving under the forces of continental drift. For this reason, Smith said it is likely that the two animals had a common ancestor that once roamed across the combined land mass of the two continents.

Although the discovery site in Egypt is now desert, Smith said once it was a dinosaur paradise, with ferns and mangrove-like trees growing beside a warm tropical sea. There were many other dinosaurs, along with fish, turtles and sharks, he said.

"It was probably like the southwestern coast of Florida, kind like the Everglades," said Smith. "It was a really productive ecosystem that was probably a perfect place for



An undated, recent computer-generated handout image of a Paralititan stromeri dinosaur, the fossilised remains of which have been found in the Egyptian desert. The long-necked animal that weighed 70 tons lived on a lush coastal plain in what is now the Sahara Desert some 90 million years ago and may have been the second largest dinosaur ever to walk on the Earth, researchers say.

these guys." Something about the area, he said, allowed animals to thrive and grow to immense size.

Later, the sea level fell and the continents shifted more. Now the discovery site is almost 200 miles from the Mediterranean, on a desert plateau.

It may have been "dinosaur

heaven," Smith said, but it was also a dangerous place for Paralititan.

Living at the same time and place were three of the biggest known dinosaur predators - fast, toothy hunters that at 50 feet were bigger than the more famous Tyrannosaurus rex.