

Koreas trade fire

Shooting seen as a precursor to heightened tensions on the world's last Cold War border

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korea exchanged machinegun fire with communist North Korea yesterday in a rare incident that could raise the diplomatic stakes just as Pyongyang appears set to return to talks on its nuclear ambitions.

The South's joint chiefs of staff said its troops returned fire after the North shot at an observation post in the Demilitarized Zone, the divided peninsula's fortified frontier.

The firing -- the last such incident was in November 2001 -- occurred as the United States and China sought to coax North Korea back into talks.

Beijing said a Chinese envoy just back from Pyongyang would visit Washington. A US official said earlier the North may be ready to talk about its atomic weapons plans.

The shooting could be seen as a precursor to heightened tensions

on the world's last Cold War border, days from the 50th anniversary of the July 27 armistice that ended the Korean War.

But the North has in the past raised tensions to attract attention or before climbing down to a compromise or concession.

"Everything that they have done on the DMZ over the course of the past few years has been done with a particular purpose," said Korea expert Scott Snyder of the Asia Foundation in Seoul.

The North Koreans have continued to look for ways to remind the United States that it is out there and that they can do damage as a way of trying to draw attention."

In Washington, a State Department official said North Korea appeared ready to resume three-way talks with China and the United States. After an inconclusive round in April, the North reverted to insisting on direct US

talks.

In Tokyo, top government

spokesman Yasuo Fukuda told reporters: "There may be a chance that things could come together in the direction of being able to have them. But I can't say anything about what form they might take."

Colonel Lee Hong-ki, a spokesman for the South Korean military, told reporters it was not yet clear what type of machinegun had been used in the incident. The joint chiefs and the US-led United Nations Command were investigating.

Lee said North Korea fired four shots in a single burst at a South Korean post. The South answered with a warning and returned fire with 17 shots, a minute after the North.

One was wounded in the South. There was no immediate comment from the North.

The navies of the two Koreas fought along their disputed maritime border in June 2002. Six South Korean sailors and an estimated 13 Northern seamen died.

Flood spectre looms even larger

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Floods have further strengthened over several of the 26 districts worst-hit in a month-long spell that left tens of thousands of people homeless or marooned.

According to a weather watch of the Flood Warning Centre yesterday, the flood situation in Dhaka, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Madaripur, Sharaitpur, Narisingdi, Narayanganj and Kishoreganj is likely to turn worse.

The spectre of floods looms over the low-lying areas on the outskirts of the capital because of the monsoon-swollen Buriganga and Shitalakhya. Much of Bashabo, Manda, Mugda, Pubail and Badda went under water yesterday.

An official estimate says the floods triggered by heavy rains and onrush of swirling inflow of waters from upstream have affected as many as 795 unions in 131 upazilas of 26 districts, leaving around

35,54,746 people of 7,43,893 families marooned.

In a sign of inundation of new areas, at least 20 villages in Barisal and another 10 in Bhola were swamped with floodwaters, cutting off thousands of people from help or forcing hundred others to move to safety with their belongings.

The Bhola town protection embankment is under the threat of total collapse after it has lost some parts to the flooding, our Barisal correspondent reports. Vast tracts of land have been devoured by the Arial Kha, Joyonty and other branches of the Meghna, now in

spate. Char Mania, Boalia, Brojomohan, Baliaitali, Chhabipur, Batamara, Alimabad, Jagorani and Selimpur, Purbo Bani Mardan, Manoshaganj and Goshchar areas

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

New Saddam tape urges holy war

AB, Baghdad

A speaker purported to be Saddam Hussein exhorted his followers to wage a holy war against US and British forces in a new recording played yesterday -- the anniversary of the revolution that put the former leader's party in power in Iraq.

Arabic television stations broadcast the audio tape as US troops were on the lookout for attacks timed to coincide with the anniversary of the 1968 Baath party revolution. Saddam officially took power 11 years later.

The recording criticizes the new Governing Council of Iraq and calls President Bush a liar.

"Anything issued by the occupation is to weaken Iraq," the taped voice said. "The only solution ... is a jihad (holy war) to resist the occupation," said the voice.

The tape, which reporters familiar with Saddam's voice said sounded authentic, appeared to be new since the Governing Council was established Sunday. But there was no way to independently authenticate the recording or to be sure of when it was made.

US intelligence officials said they were conducting a technical analysis to authenticate the message but said it was too soon to reach any conclusions.

American troops were gearing

up for attacks to mark the anniversary, but, as of the afternoon, there were no reports of violence involving US forces in Baghdad.

US soldiers have come under increasingly ferocious and frequent attack by suspected Saddam loyalists in recent weeks -- reaching an average of 12 attacks a day. More than 30 US soldiers have been killed in hostile action since Bush declared an end to major hostilities on May 1.

The Pentagon yesterday raised the number of US personnel killed in combat since the start of the Iraq

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Audit finds Tk 46 lakh fund misuse in BSC

UNB, Dhaka

A special audit into Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) under the shipping ministry revealed irregularities involving Tk 46.10 lakh in three years from 1995 to 1998 raising the cumulative loss of the public sector enterprise to Tk 135.19 crore.

Khaleda said there were similarities between the two countries in many areas. The two countries should share their experience in different successful areas for their mutual benefit.

The auditors, during the audit conducted in May-September 1999, found five serious irregularities involving Tk 46.10 lakh at the Chittagong office of BSC during fiscal years 1995-1998.

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) high

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Darwin Test begins today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are all set to face the biggest challenge in their cricket history when they play mighty Australia in the first Test at the MCG Oval in Darwin today.

Khaled Mahmud will lead the Tigers, against Steve Waugh's invincible side in the first-ever meeting between the two countries in the five-day game at the tropical northern Australian city.

Dubbed as the 'biggest mismatch' in Test history by the international media, the contest that pits David versus Goliath commences at 6 am (BST).

Although Australia's Channel Nine will beam the match live, one thing is for sure it will not be reaching any home in Bangladesh despite enormous interest.

State-run Bangladesh Television was unable to say whether it would be showing the match live or even provide highlights of the day's play.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



Visiting Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien meets Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

Salvage of Nasrin-1 likely to be abandoned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is going to decide tomorrow whether the salvage operation for MV Nasrin-1 will be continued or abandoned.

A tripartite meeting of the local administration, officials of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) and Navy personnel will take place at the deputy commissioner's office at Chandpur tomorrow review the overall situation.

Abul Hossain Chowdhury, chairman of BIWTA, said the decision on salvage operation would be taken in the meeting.

The salvage of MV Nasrin-1, 168 feet below the surface, is not possible due to strong current and is likely to be abandoned, said the district

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has welcomed the formal launching of the Vietnamese embassy in Dhaka and said it would strengthen the ties between the two countries.

"We are trying to strengthen our relations with all our neighbours," the PM said referring to her recent visits to Thailand and Myanmar.

Khaleda was exchanging views with the Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien when he called on her at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

Nien conveyed greetings from the Vietnamese president and prime minister to Khaleda Zia and invited her to visit his country.

The prime minister accepted the invitation and in turn extended invitation to the Vietnamese president and prime minister to visit Bangladesh.

She recalled her meeting with the Vietnamese president during the NAM Summit and said Dhaka is waiting to welcome him sometime in the next year.

Referring to the existing friendly

relation between the two countries, Nguyen recalled Bangladesh's support for the independence of Vietnam.

Khaleda said there were similarities between the two countries in many areas. The two countries should share their experience in different successful areas for their mutual benefit.

She particularly mentioned Vietnam's success in agriculture, aquaculture and horticulture.

The Vietnamese foreign minister also praised Bangladesh's success in different sectors including education, health and poverty alleviation.

Nguyen pledged Vietnam's support to Bangladesh for its membership in various international bodies including ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

He referred to the ASEAN-European Meet (ASEM) scheduled to be held in Hanoi next October and invited Khaleda Zia to join it.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

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SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Source: Islamic Foundation

Sun Rises Sun Sets

July 18 6-48 pm

July 19 5-21 am

Prayer Timings

July 18

Azan Jamaat

Fair 4-15 4-50

Juma 12-15 1-20

Asr 5-00 5-15

Magrib 6-55 7-00

Esha 8-15 8-45

