

BRIEFLY

New home for Kurd refugees: The arrow at the dirt-road front entrance points to "City Center," but the only structures in sight are made of nylon and tied down with ropes. AP reports from Zakho.

The allied-built Kurdish refugee camp, which welcomed its first 250 inhabitants Saturday, is planned as a model community for 21,000 people who for weeks have been living a wretched existence in the mountains along the Turkish-Iraqi border.

It is about six miles (9.6 kilometers) from the Turkish border, on the outskirts of the town of Zakho.

The first inhabitants, all male, are providing free labor for the massive undertaking of creating a small city in what before was only pasture and grain fields.

US armies as relief workers in Iraq: After weeks of uncertainty, the last US troops in southern Iraq finally know their withdrawal is imminent. For many, the sense of relief is mixed with pride in waging peace as well as they waged war. AP reports from Safwan.

Army troops have provided food, medical care and protection to more than 11,000 refugees at a US-run camp in this town near the border with Kuwait. Their efforts have won the respect and affection of many in the camp.

But over the weekend, the refugees were told they must either move to a new camp in Saudi Arabia or remain unprotected in Iraq after the US troops withdraw.

Most agreed to be transferred, and an airlift to the Saudi camp entered its second day Monday. The operation could be completed within a week, and the Safwan camp will then be closed.

EC ministers agree on arms control: European Community (EC) Foreign Ministers agreed in Mondorf-les-Bains, Sunday to step up plans for arms control in unstable regions—particularly in the Middle East. AFP reports.

Foreign Minister Jacques Poos, speaking for the Luxembourg presidency of the EC, said the community was working on a plan for an international register of arms sales, kept by the United Nations.

The plan, which is to be presented to the UN later this year, also involves controls of arms exports, with special attention to arms of mass destruction such as nuclear, biologic, chemical and missile-borne weapons.

2,000 detained for Peru violence: Peruvian police Sunday said they detained more than 2,000 suspects in a sweep for leftist rebels who have killed more than 60 people in the past week. AFP reports from Lima.

Police said they had arrested 1,460 men, 931 women and 52 juveniles they believed were linked to subversive activities following the sayings of 29 people last week and bombings Thursday of 75 bank and commercial facilities.

Eighty-three of suspects were handed over to a police anti-terrorist squad for their suspected involvement in the recent attacks while the others were the others were released pending further investigation.

3 Chinese to die: China has sentenced three men to death for looting an army arsenal in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa and killing a guard, a Chinese government official said Monday in Beijing, reports Reuter.

An official in Lhasa, contacted by telephone from Beijing, said a court had this month found Wu Lingchun, Yang Bing and Luo Pingyuan guilty of staging the raid and sentenced them to death.

Nine people were arrested early this month for looting the arsenal on March 28. Tibetan radio has reported that 19 pistols and 869 rounds of ammunition were stolen.

32 killed in S. Africa: At least 32 people died in bloody clashes in South Africa's black townships at the weekend, 10 of them when armed Zulu warriors went on the rampage after a funeral in Soweto near Johannesburg on Sunday, police said, AFP reports.

The surge of violence followed claims by Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) on Saturday that Zulu leaders Chief Mangosuthu Buthelez's Inkatha freedom party had hatched massive plans to attack black communities and assassinate ANC leaders.

Colombia to cut army spending: Colombia called on developing countries to cut military spending and channel the funds into programmes aimed at eliminating poverty. Finance Minister Rudolf Hommes said on Sunday Reuter reports from Washington.

Hommes told a news conference after chairing a meeting of the group of 24 (G-24) developing countries that the proposal caught his colleagues by surprise and they wanted more time to debate it.

"The general response was favourable but this was a surprise proposal," Hommes said, adding "people felt it should go through a screening process first."

Kim asks MPs to fight for democracy

PYONGYANG, Apr 29: To thunderous applause, North Korea's hardline Stalinist leader Kim Il-Sung exhorted parliamentarians from around the world Monday to fight for democracy and nuclear disarmament, reports Reuter.

"Disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons and other types of mass destruction weapons in now the most pressing task in ensuring peace," Kim told delegates from about 90 countries at the opening ceremony of an inter-parliamentary union conference in Pyongyang where dangers of nuclear proliferation will be a key topic.

North Korea itself has become the focus of international fears about nuclear proliferation with US intelligence reports showing Pyongyang may be only a few years away from producing its own nuclear bomb. Pyongyang denies it is manufacturing weapons.

"The test and production of nuclear weapons must be banned, the existing nuclear weapons must be reduced and, further, all nuclear weapons must be completely abolished," said Kim who is known to his people as the "Great Leader".

Kim, who celebrated his 79th birthday this month, is the object of perhaps the world's most intense personality cult, rivaling or even surpassing in scale the cults of Chinese and Soviet Leaders Mao Tse-tung and Josef Stalin.

He walked unaided to the rostrum in the Cavernous Mansudae Assembly Hall where North Korea's parliament, the supreme people's assembly, holds its sessions. He spoke in a strong, clear voice.

SAARC meet on tourism promotion begins

COLOMBO, Apr 29: Experts on tourism from seven member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) met here Monday to work out a strategy for joint cooperation in tourism promotion in the South Asian region, reports Xinhua.

In his key-note address at the meeting, Secretary of Sri Lankan Tourism Ministry D. Wijesinghe said that during the two-day meeting, the experts would identify the areas for cooperation.

They would determine national arrangements that would be necessary to work on such identified areas, he said.

He added that while tourism had been growing globally, its performance in the countries of South Asia had not been very impressive.

Iraq frees one Bangladeshi, 16 Kuwaiti detainees

RIYADH, Apr 29: Iraq handed over 16 Kuwaiti and one Bangladeshi to Saudi border authorities on Sunday, a spokesman for the International Red Cross said, reports Reuter.

Iraq has returned nearly 6,700 Kuwaiti detainees as part of a ceasefire agreement reached between allied and Iraqi military officials.

Kuwaiti authorities have given Iraqi officials lists of 5,000 missing citizens they believe are still in Iraq, but Baghdad says it has no record of this number.

Military officials from both sides are due to meet in Riyadh on Monday to discuss the exchange of remaining prisoners and missing people.

International Red Cross officials in Riyadh say the return of Iraqi prisoners of war (POWs) from Saudi Arabia was stopped last Monday to enable Saudi authorities to reorganise their camps.

About 62,000 of 75,000 registered POWs have already been released. The ICRC says thousands do not want to go home.

Iraq denied on Sunday it was rebuilding its arms industry with sanctions-busting shipments arranged through a secret purchasing operation set up in Jordan.

The ministry of information described a report in Britain's Observer newspaper as part of "a campaign of distortion and propaganda against Iraq and a probable move to prepare the ground for some new measure against the country."

"The (United Nations Trade) embargo blockade have been so firmly and brutally implemented, that even food and medicine are not allowed to reach Iraq," a spokesman said.

He added that the Iraqi government was making every effort to arrange food for its people and rebuild facilities damaged by the United States and its Gulf War allies around the country.

The Observer quoted Jordanian sources as saying Saddam Hussein had set up a huge purchasing network in Jordan to buy weapons and equipment, banned by the UN sanctions, to rebuild his war-shattered arms industry.

It quoted US defence and intelligence sources as saying Iraq was smuggling in stocks of spare parts and ammunition from North Korea and China.

Cargoes were being shipped through Singapore, where they were reloaded to disguise its point of origin.

Shortly before the allied forces launched their assault to drive Iraq out of Kuwait in January, the United States accused North Korea of supplying Baghdad with arms. Pyongyang denied the charge.

The Observer said Saddam was preparing his armament factories to resume production of weapons, ammunition and armour plate, needed by the Iraqi government to put an end to Kurdish and Shi'ite revolts.

Purchases were being financed by funds held by Iraq in Jordanian and Swiss bank accounts set up before the Gulf War, the report said.

ZAKHO (Iraq): Three Kurdish refugee mothers await medical attention for their children at an Iraqi hospital manned by US Army doctors 28 April. Thousands of people seek help from the hospital, mainly for children suffering from malnutrition and associated health problems. — AFP photo

Izzat Ibrahim tells foreign journalists

'West will have to kill 18m Iraqis to wound Saddam'

TIKRIT (Iraq, Apr 29): Saddam Hussein's hometown celebrated his birthday Sunday with music, traditional dances and official predictions that he will be president for a long time to come, reports AP.

It was one of many celebrations throughout the country honoring Saddam on his 54th birthday, the first since the Gulf crisis brought Iraq to military defeat, rebellion by Kurds in the north and Shi'ite Muslims in the south, and near economic ruin.

Officials said the Tikrit crowd was much smaller than normal, but said Saddam remained popular. They attributed the lower turnout to transportation difficulties in the war-ravaged country.

"The West would have to kill 18 million Iraqis before they could wound Saddam Hussein," said Izzat Ibrahim, deputy chairman of the ruling Revolutionary Command Council.

"What happened in the last nine months to Iraq and President Saddam Hussein proves he is a legitimate leader and accepted and loved by the Iraqi people," Ibrahim said.

"He will be president for a long, long time," said Abdul-Razzak Kassem al-Hashemi, Minister of Higher Education and former Ambassador to France.

The officials spoke to a group of foreign journalists on a government-sponsored trip to view the celebration.

The spectacle took place in a stadium with a paved parade ground where schoolgirls in bright-colored dresses danced to music blaring from large loudspeakers near a reviewing stand.

Bands playing bagpipes and drums escorted the girls onto the field. Speeches were made and people chanted beneath a huge portrait of Saddam rising above the bleachers opposite the reviewing stand, where Ibrahim and other officials watched.

Saddam himself toured Baghdad, at one point getting out of his car to shake hands, according to state-run Baghdad radio.

"The sons of the city were happy with the President's tour and they welcomed him with clapping and singing, expressing their trust in a happy and bright future under his leadership," the radio said.

A few thousand people attended this year's event in Tikrit. Normally, about 100,000 people from throughout Iraq attend the celebration, said Sabah Adana, an organizer and dean of education at the University of Tikrit.

Gasoline shortages have made transportation extremely difficult, although rationing ended Sunday and there were many cars on the road between Baghdad and Tikrit, 100 miles (160 kilometers) to the north.

Scores of cars lined up in front of gasoline stations, however, taking advantage of the increased fuel supplies.

Ibrahim said Iraqis are still behind Saddam despite the ordeal of war and rebellion and the economic trials caused by the U.N. embargo.

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Saleem succeeded to the post last year when JKLK military chief Yaseen Malik and his deputy, Sheikh Abdul Hameed, were arrested in a similar raid in Srinagar. They are still in a Delhi jail detained without trial under anti-terrorist laws.

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Off the Record

Pink Army indeed

PRAGUE, (Czechoslovakia): The last Red Army tank in Czechoslovakia looked Sunday like it belonged to the Pink Army instead, reports AP.

The CTK news agency reported that the tank, a monument to Soviet soldiers who liberated Prague in May 1945, was painted pink overnight and that police found a young man nearby who produced a fake slip from the city government authorizing his work.

The Prague mayor's office issued a statement condemning what it called an "act of vandalism."

It said the World War II vintage tank would be covered until the paint can be removed "to spare the public the view of the desecrated cultural memorial," CTK reported.

Earlier, officials of the district where the tank is located had proposed auctioning it.

But President Vaclav Havel and many other people protested, and the plan was canceled.

The Soviet Union is scheduled to complete its military withdrawal from its former Warsaw Pact ally this summer. The last of the Soviet tanks that were stationed in Czechoslovakia left this spring.

CTK did not identify the young man, or say whether he had been arrested.

Charles back in the saddle

LONDON: For the first time since he shattered his arm in a polo match 10 months ago, Prince Charles climbed back in the saddle for a pre-season polo warm-up Sunday, reports AP.

Only hours after returning from an official visit to Brazil, the heir to the British throne played with friends from the Cirencester Park Club at Aston Down, a short drive from his Highgrove mansion in western England.

Polo manager Major Ronald Ferguson, whose daughter Sarah is married to Charles' younger brother Andrew, watched from the sideline along with dozens of camera crews and reporters.

Charles, 43, broke his arm in two places in a fall last June and had to undergo months of physical therapy, leading to speculation that his polo-playing days were over.

Afterward, Charles said he was "very happy" with his performance. His first official polo game will be May 16.

Highest honour for Cardin

PARIS: French designer Pierre Cardin is being awarded Japan's highest honour for his contributions to the Japanese fashion industry and promoting cultural exchanges between Paris and Tokyo, reports AP.

Cardin, 69, will be given the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold and Silver Star in a ceremony Monday at the Japanese Embassy, the embassy said Sunday.

One of the best-known fashion designers in the western world, Cardin first visited Tokyo in 1957 to teach a course at the Bunka Fashion College.

"Today, the Japanese have nothing left to learn in this field, where they've assumed a very important place," Cardin said. "But they all continue to come to Paris to present their collections."

Among his pupils were Kenzo and Hanae Mori, who went on to become stars on the Paris fashion scene.

Cardin has visited Japan about 50 times since his first visit and remains an honorary professor at Bunka Fashion College.

Lankan troops slay 100 rebels

COLOMBO, Apr 29: The Sri Lankan military Monday said it killed "over 100" Tamil rebels during a combined air and ground offensive outside a key northern military base over the weekend, and lost 25 men killed in action, reports AFP.

Troops moved a few hundred meters (yards) out of the Elephant Pass camp from its southern boundary but by and large the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continued to occupy the surrounding area, a spokesman said.

Helicopters destroyed a bus and seven other vehicles transporting militants to the battle front just outside the camp late Saturday as soldiers came out of the base, a military spokesman here said.

The troops were attempting to break the blockade by the LTTE and end continuous harassing rocket attacks on the camp, which commands the gateway to the LTTE's main stronghold of Jaffna Peninsula further north.

"We have lost 24 soldiers and a young officer. About 50 soldiers were wounded and have been evacuated by air for treatment," the spokesman said.

He said troops at Elephant Pass, which continues to be supplied only by air, had observed LTTE men building more bunkers on the northern and northeastern side of the camp despite Saturday's battle.

Sweden closing open door for asylum

STOCKHOLM, Apr 29: Sweden is closing the open door that made it a refuge for everyone from American draft dodgers to African victims of torture, but will leave it ajar, reports AP.

The Social Democratic government has introduced legislation to restrict asylum that reflects political changes abroad and budgetary problems at home. The bill is expected to pass in May.

It would end the virtually automatic right to asylum for anyone risk of conscription. When the Gulf War began, the Foreign Ministry reflected the new attitude by announcing it would not grant asylum to American soldiers trying to escape duty in Kuwait or Iraq.

Sweden, with a population of 8.5 million, has taken in about 189,000 refugees in 20 years at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. The largest single group was from Iran.

Opposition to the refugees has grown and for the first time, a party with a clear anti-immigration platform plans to contest the general election in September.

"Last year was a bad year," said Peter Nobel, a government ombudsman for ethnic discrimination. "It started with racist propaganda and a wave of crimes directed against immigrants. There was a lot of violence also against refugee centers. The new law would permit a ceiling to be put on the number of refugees. No figure has been chosen, but the 29,700 places for refugees to that of the Geneva Convention, but leaves room for asylum-seekers who "especially warrant protection" or whose reflection "clearly would conflict with humanitarian demands."

According to the convention, a refugee is someone with a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political views.

The government bill links refugee policy and foreign aid in an effort to discourage people from fleeing countries in turmoil.

"Many people don't escape political persecution, but war, poverty and social disturbances," said Vivi Samuelsson, a Labor Ministry official. "They don't qualify as refugees under the Geneva Convention and should be able to see their hope and future at home."

In the past, it was easy for Eastern Europeans to qualify for asylum in Sweden on humanitarian grounds, if not political. Immigration authorities began operating under emergency rules in December 1989, however, after ethnic Turks from Bulgaria overloaded the system.

(Hundreds of Bangladeshis are in Sweden already, seeking political asylum and many more are trying to go there.)



ZAKHO (Iraq): Three Kurdish refugee mothers await medical attention for their children at an Iraqi hospital manned by US Army doctors 28 April. Thousands of people seek help from the hospital, mainly for children suffering from malnutrition and associated health problems. — AFP photo

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Burmese troops seize 18 Thai workers

MAE SOT, Thailand, Apr 29: Burmese troops, ordered by the Thai military to pull back across the border, seized 18 workers at a Thai logging camp, police and provincial officials said Monday, reports Reuter.

They said the workers were released 10 hours later after negotiations between the two sides.

About 60 Burmese soldiers had raided the camp in Suring Village, Mar Hong Son province, on Sunday morning and taken away five trucks as well as the workers.

The Thai officials said the Burmese were angry at being told to withdraw from Thailand.

About 200 troops crossed the border in early April and set up a base in a Thai village to strike from behind at anti-government guerrillas camped along the frontier.

JKLF leader arrested

SRINAGAR, India, Apr 29: Indian Security Forces have arrested a leader of the main Kashmiri militant group fighting for the independence of the Himalayan region, police said Monday, reports Reuter.

They said Muhammad Saleem, Deputy Chief Commander of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was picked up during raids on Sunday in Srinagar, summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir which is the only Muslim majority state in largely Hindu India.

Saleem succeeded to the post last year when JKLF military chief Yaseen Malik and his deputy, Sheikh Abdul Hameed, were arrested in a similar raid in Srinagar. They are still in a Delhi jail detained without trial under anti-terrorist laws.

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