

BRIEFLY

Pindi accuses India of harming ties: Pakistan accused India on Tuesday of harming ties between their neighbouring countries by killing at least 68 Muslim militants in the disputed state of Kashmir. Reuter reports from Islamabad.

The foreign Ministry called Indian High Commissioner (ambassador) Jyotindra Nath Dixit to tell him of Pakistan's "deep concern" over Sunday night's killings, a ministry statement said.

He was told the killings had aroused strong emotions in Pakistan and that such acts were "bound to further vitiate the atmosphere of Pakistan-India relations."

France carries out N-blast: France carried out an underground nuclear explosion at its Mururoa a toll testing ground in the South Pacific on Tuesday, an army spokesman said, Reuter reports from Paris.

The yield of the 1706 GMT blast was less than 10 kilotons, the spokesman added.

A kiloton is equivalent to 1,000 tons of the atom bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima in 1945 was equivalent to 15 kilotons.

Gas explosion kill 147 in China: A huge gas explosion demolished a North China coal mine last month, killing 147 workers who were buried alive, the People's Daily said Wednesday. Reuter reports from Beijing.

The explosion at the state-run Sanjiao River mine in Shanxi Province on April 21 killed all the miners working below ground, the Communist Party's official newspaper said.

Emeka's concern over apartheid: Commonwealth Secretary-General Emeka Anyaoku said on Tuesday the threatened rupture between the South African government and the African National Congress (ANC) would be catastrophic for hopes of a peaceful end to apartheid. Reuter reports from London.

The extent of violence gripping South Africa becomes every day more tragic, Anyaoku said in a statement.

He urged Pretoria to take firm steps to stop factional violence in townships and suggested restricting the use of weapons of all types and "dealing with individuals implicated in the violence."

PLO leader upset: Leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization, a long-term friend of the Soviet Union, are privately upset at Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh's plans to visit Israel Friday, AFP reports from Tunis.

The PLO leadership has however refrained from any official comment on the visit.

Bessmertnykh was due in Syria Wednesday on the first leg of his Middle East Mission to assess the possibilities for a peace conference sponsored by Washington and Moscow.

Klerk to meet Mandela: President F.W. De Klerk said he would meet African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela to hammer out a last-ditch accord on measures to end township warfare that has killed almost 800 people this year, Reuter reports from Cape Town.

De Klerk declined to say on Tuesday when the meeting would take place, but political analysts said it would probably be in Johannesburg today, only hours before expiry of an ANC ultimatum demanding government action to end the killings.

De Klerk summoned Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party, to Cape Town on Tuesday, for urgent talks on the Township Carnage and said at a news conference afterwards he would cure the right of Zulu tribesmen to carry traditional weapons.

Award against KAL set aside: A US appeals court on Tuesday set aside a 50 million dollar award against Korean Air Lines arising from the 1983 Soviet downing of an airliner with 269 people on board, Reuter reports from Washington.

By a 2-1 vote, the court said the Warsaw Convention, the International Treaty Governing Airline Travel, does not provide for punitive damages for injuries or deaths arising from International Airline disasters.

Punitive damages are awarded to punish corporate wrongdoing to deter such conduct in the future.

Bush spends full day in office

WASHINGTON, May 8: US President George Bush, looking a bit tired but otherwise fine, worked a full day on Monday after his release from Bethesda Naval Medical Centre where he had been treated for an irregular heartbeat, reports Reuter.

Doctors said it is possible that Bush, 66, had been suffering from an irregular heartbeat before the weekend incident that led to his treatment.

The ailment was uncovered on Saturday after the President complained of fatigue while jogging.

The White House said Bush's heartbeat had returned to normal and that "no problems of any kind have arisen since he left the hospital"

and that he continued taking medication.

"We have lots to be grateful for," Bush told visitors at a White House reception. "I really do feel wonderfully well, so we're very lucky. I'm glad to be here in more ways than one."

During a briefing at the hospital on Monday, Bush's personal physician Dr Burton Lee said Bush had complained of fatigue during exercise in the last couple of weeks but that he could find nothing wrong with the President. He has said to me in the last couple of weeks, 'gee whizz, may be I'm getting older.' But at that time, there was nothing there. And I'm getting older, so I sort of sympathised with him," Lee said.

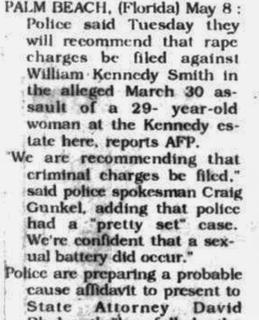
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Kennedy's nephew likely to be sued for rape



Kennedy Smith

PALM BEACH, (Florida) May 8: Police said Tuesday they will recommend that rape charges be filed against William Kennedy Smith in the alleged March 30 assault of a 29-year-old woman at the Kennedy estate here, reports AFP.

"We are recommending that criminal charges be filed," said police spokesman Craig Gunkel, adding that police had a "pretty set" case. "We're confident that a sexual battery did occur."

Police are preparing a probable cause affidavit to present to State Attorney David Budworth "hopefully by the end of the week," Mr. Gunkel said.

Mr. Smith, 30, a student at Georgetown University Medical School, is the nephew of Senator Edward Kennedy, who was at the mansion the night of the alleged attack but has said he was unaware that anything had happened.

Parliamentary body to probe witch-hunting
Nawaz Sharif agrees on Sharia Laws

ISLAMABAD, May 8: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has agreed to most demands of Islamic scholars on a controversial law that will tighten religious control of Pakistan a government statement said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The statement said the scholars, who met Sharif in Islamabad, were completely satisfied with the progress of his plan to enforce the Islamic Sharia Code.

The six-month-old government introduced a bill in parliament last month declaring Sharia to be Pakistan's "Supreme Law."

But Sharif's Fundamentalist Allies denounced it as too weak compared to a harsher bill they had proposed to give them control of a new Islamic judiciary overruling parliament.

"Through unanimous agreement, seven of the eight proposed Amendments (of scholars) have already been incorporated in the Sharia bill while proposals for ordering the economy on Islamic principles are under review," the official statement said.

Details of the amendments were not immediately available. But the official statement said the scholars "expressed complete satisfaction over the progress in this direction and prayed for the success of the

legislative measures proposed for the introduction of Sharia." The scholars included heads of Islamic Religious Parties that were instrumental in last year's election victory by Sharif's Islamic Democratic



Alliance (IDA) against former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Sharif earned rare praise from Bhutto for saying in a speech last month that he was not a Fundamentalist and would not block Modernisation.

But the remark angered the religious forum which demanded an explanation from him.

The scholars launched a trade against Sharif, accusing him of deviating from an elec-

tion pledge. The government's bill, which is still being scrutinised by a select committee of the National Assembly (lower house) before a formal debate, seemed to sidestep the scholars' demand for controlling Islamic courts.

AFP adds from Karachi: A joint government-opposition parliamentary committee is due to start a probe Friday into an alleged witch-hunt of opposition activists in southern Sindh Province, but observers doubt the move will lessen tensions.

Already the inquiry is being questioned by Sindh Chief Minister Jam Sadiq Ali, who is blamed by the Opposition Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA) for what it calls a region of terror in the province.

"They are welcome as complainants, but not as an investigating team," Ali said at a press conference Tuesday, while a PDA member of the committee, former Interior Minister Ateez Ahsan, insisted the team did have an investigative mandate.

The formation of the committee last month ended a boycott of the National Assembly by PDA deputies led by former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who returned here Monday from a foreign

The opposition alleges that the Chief Minister has been engaged in systematic victimization, including the framing of false cases and the kidnapping of PDA deputies during recent Senate elections.

Ms. Bhutto, addressing a press conference here Monday, demanded the dismissal of the Sindh Provincial government due to what she called an "alarming deterioration" in the law and order situation in the province.

Alleging that PDA deputies had suffered kidnapping and torture, she said the Sindh government had ceased to function and therefore, "it should not continue."

The former Prime Minister said it appeared that her home province was being ruled by "terrorists."

Denying the charges, Ali challenged Ms. Bhutto to bring a no confidence motion against him in the Sindh assembly.

"Whenever Ms. Bhutto is angry she starts levelling accusations," the Chief Minister remarked.

"She was no right to interfere in our affairs," he said, adding that under the constitution, a chief minister can be removed only by the assembly.

The province has been plagued by a spate of kidnappings which have been attributed mostly to bandits.

175 Air India pilots on strike

BOMBAY, May 8: Nearly 175 pilots of India's state-run Air India have refused to fly planes from Monday night, partially disrupting flight schedules, airline officials said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The airline operated only seven of the 12 flights that had been scheduled for Tuesday, but the officials said they were confident that two more would take off. Three flights were cancelled, they added.

The flights were being operated by executive pilots who are not members of the pilots union, the Indian Pilots Guild. There are about 80 executive pilots, the officials said.

The Guild called the strike after one of its members, Sharma, was asked by the government to explain why he had refused in October to operate a flight from London to Bombay.

Sharma had said operating that flight would have meant an extension of his duty hours by 10 minutes beyond a limit set in negotiations between the management and the union.

Japan to send medical team for Kurds

TOKYO, May 8: Japan said today it will send an emergency medical team to Turkey this week to help Kurdish refugees, reports Reuter.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Misoji Sakamoto told a news conference that three doctors, three liaison officials and four nurses would help with medical services on the Iraq-Turkey border for Kurdish refugees.

Japan has provided 100 million dollars for the refugees fleeing Iraqi forces.



BAGHDAD: Members of the Iraqi government (L) holding a second round of talks with members of the Iraqi Kurdish opposition here May 7. The two delegations discussed the means of promoting positive dialogue to guarantee Iraq's unity and stability. — Photo AFP/UNB

Saddam orders trial of instigators of Kurdish stir

BAGHDAD, May 8: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, on a visit to his hometown of Tikrit, has called for the trial of officials who failed to act during Shi'ite Muslim and Kurdish uprisings against his rule in March, reports Reuter.

Iraq's official news agency INA today quoted Saddam as blaming "hoologans" instigated from abroad for the revolts.

Iraq has repeatedly accused Iran of helping the rebels by sending arms and men across the border.

The fraternal spirit of Iraqis was manifested in the great cohesion in facing the evil hoologans who came from abroad," Saddam was quoted as saying in reference to the failed uprisings which flared

after Iraq's defeat by the US-led Allies in the Gulf war.

Events through which Iraq passed are unprecedented and a cruel test...the fate of all Iraq was facing a test," he said.

He governates where the hoologans showed up ought to call for the trial of those who failed to carry out their duty and alert noble citizens at the time.

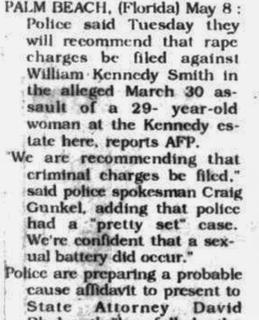
The agency said the President was addressing officials during a visit on Monday to Tikrit, 170 km (105 miles)

north of Baghdad, in Salahuddin governorate.

The Babil (Babylon) newspaper said the Iraq President was accompanied by the new governor of Salahuddin, Wabtan Ibrahim Al-Hassan, who is his half brother.

The agency said Saddam was cheered during his tour of several town in the governorate by crowds attacking US President George Bush and chanting: "Bush, Bush, listen carefully. We all love Saddam Hussein."

Curfew in Washington: Mayor firm to contain violence



Mayor Sharon Pratt Dixon

WASHINGTON, May 8: The Mayor of Washington slapped a long curfew on a riot neighbourhood barely a mile from the White House on Tuesday, vowing to prevent a third night of street violence in the US capital, reports Reuter.

"We can't surrender to that," Mayor Sharon Pratt Dixon said in announcing her plan to get tough with rioters who looted stores, burned police cars and smashed windows with rocks and bottles on Sunday and Monday.

She ordered police to arrest anyone on the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood's streets between 7 pm and 5 am (2300 and 0900 GMT), extending the curfew from only five hours on Monday night.

Sparked by Sunday night's police shooting of a Hispanic man during an arrest for disorderly conduct, the incident inflamed the smouldering anger Latin American immigrants have for city authorities.

"People's nerves are frayed," Dixon said at a news conference. "People have grown weary."

"Some of them can't enjoy their own homes. There's tear gas in the area. Doors are being broken down. Windows have been broken in. People are hurling insults at one another.

100 killed in Malaysian fire

SUNGAI BULOH (Malaysia), May 8: Rescuers scored the site of Malaysia's worst fire for remains of over 100 people believed killed when a fireworks factory was rent by explosions and razed to the ground in this village near the capital Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Forty people had been confirmed dead by hospital officials six hours after the blaze began. Rescuers expect the number to rise to over 100 as more than 150 workers were in the factory when the fire started at 3.30 p. m. (0730 GMT).

There must have been multiple explosions," Malaysian Fire Chief Badaruddin Isa told reporters. "They had no chance to escape."

"I saw dead bodies, broken legs and broken heads. They were all burnt," a rescue worker said on television. "There were no survivors."

"This is a very serious disaster," said Senior Minister Samy Velu. "I was told many of those killed were residents of Squatter Houses near the factory."

4 USAID officials indicted for fraud

WASHINGTON, May 8: Four senior officials of the troubled US Agency for International Development (AID) are to be indicted for fraud, a Senate hearing was told on Tuesday.

The indictments were mentioned by Senator Patrick Leahy, Chairman of the Congressional Appropriations Subcommittee that provides billions of dollars in foreign aid funds, at a hearing on aid management reforms.

"This morning I was told that four senior aid officials are about to be indicted for fraud," the Vermont Democrat told the agency's administrator Ronald Roskens, who indicated he was aware of the pending indictments.

Mamata to contest from S. Calcutta

CALCUTTA, May 8: The West Bengal Congress Committee president, S. S. Ray announced that the Youth Congress-I chief, Mamata Banerjee would contest the prestigious Calcutta south parliamentary constituency in the coming elections, subject to approval by the Congress-I parliament board, reports PTI.

Ray was speaking just before leaving for New Delhi. He said he was carrying a list of Congress-I candidates for 42 Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal for placing before the CPB meeting on Friday.

Ray said he had no desire to contest a Lok Sabha seat and the question of his contesting the Darjeeling seat, as reported in a section of the press, therefore did not arise.

Hispanics, the US term for Latin American immigrants and their descendants.

A neighbourhood commissioner, Antonio Mendez, told Reuters the curfew would help on Tuesday night but a long-term solution was needed.

"This is not a racial situation. They were throwing rocks at authority," said Mendez, who serves as an elected liaison between the neighbourhood and the city government.

The Tuesday night curfew would cover a wide area in the heart of northwest Washington. Its southern edge was about a kilometre and a half (about a mile) north of the White House.

Dixon, facing her first real test since she succeeded the controversial Marion Barry as mayor in January, clearly meant to move swiftly to ensure Washington did not endure a repeat of the 1968 riots that remain a vivid nightmare.

Those riots left physical and economic scars on central Washington that lingered for many years.

People on the neighbourhood's streets said they thought the anger represented a backlash against alleged harsh treatment by city police, most of whom do not speak

Off the Record



HONG KONG: Kris Aquino, actress and daughter of Philippine President Corason Aquino, prepares to shoot a scene for the movie 'Happy Ghost 5' currently being filmed in Hong Kong in this recent photo. Kris Aquino arrived 20 April to begin work on this, her first international film. —AFP photo

'Odd couple coming back'

PITTSBURGH: Felix and Oscar, the mismatched 'Odd Couple' whose wives threw them out and asked them never to return, may be coming back, reports AP.

Walter Matthau, who played the unkempt Oscar in the Broadway play and the 1969 movie, said Friday that he and creator Neil Simon discussed a sequel.

"There may be an Odd Couple 2," said Matthau, who was in Pittsburgh filming a television movie. We all sat around and Simon was throwing out ideas and I was throwing out ideas and Simon said, 'If you would just shut up' would have the first act written already."

"Actually, I think he's got 50 pages written already" Matthau said. Simon's publicist, Bill Evans, said Saturday that he didn't know anything about the project but didn't doubt Matthau. Evans said he wasn't sure whether Matthau, who made his comments in an interview in Saturday's Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, was referring to a sequel play film.

Jack Lemmon played the fussy Felix in the movie. The story was first a Broadway play and later a television series starring the late Jack Klugman and Tony Randall.

Andy Williams's marriage

NEW YORK: Andy Williams, the 60-year-old crooner known for his rendition of "Moon River," married girlfriend Debbie Haas, the singer's spokesman said, reports AP.

Williams and Ms Haas, 36, exchanged vows Friday night in a civil ceremony attended by family and close friends at the singer's Manhattan residence, publicist Paul Sheffrin said.

It was the second marriage for both the bride and the groom, who planned to spend their honeymoon in the Dominican Republic, Sheffrin said Saturday. They had been dating for four years, he said.

Williams has three children from his previous marriage to Claudine Longet.

Riyadh spending billions for Haj

MAKKAH, May 8: Haunted by catastrophe as more and more Muslims flock to their holiest city, the Saudi Arabian government is spending billions of dollars improving and extending facilities for the pilgrims, reports Reuter.

The din of construction reverberates through Makkah's work goes on around the clock to create more space for some two million Muslims expected during the annual Hajj which falls this year in late June.

Huge yellow cranes tower above the grand mosque which encloses the Kaaba, which Muslims all over the world face during prayer.

Bulldozers are tearing up the street outside, the hammering of drills is audible within the marble walls of the mosque itself but they stop when the call to prayer rings out from its minarets five times a day.

Project supervisors say the Saudi government, guardian of the shrines at Makkah and nearby Medina, is spending more than six billion riyals (1.6 billion dollars) to ease congestion during the annual pilgrimage.

Officials say some facilities will eventually accommodate more than three million people at a time, but they do not know when the government will lift quotas for foreign pilgrims.

Saudi Arabia introduced quotas in 1988, after more than 400, mainly Iranian, pilgrims were killed in clashes with security forces. It said it had to restrict numbers so that the butlers could expand the pilgrimage sites.

Last year more than 1,400 pilgrims were suffocated or trampled to death in a stampede inside an overcrowded pedestrian tunnel.