

BRIEFLY

Kuwaiti opposition holds rally:

Government opponents held a poorly attended rally on Monday to call for the restoration of the constitution and protest the opening of the National Council created to satisfy pro-democratic demands.

The council is to begin work Tuesday after an address by ruling Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah. The emir created the body last year.

The opposition accuses the government of creating the National Council to defuse criticism that it is failing to implement greater democracy in Kuwait, while at the same time postponing parliamentary elections until October 1992.

The emir suspended parliament and the free press in 1986 after it criticized his relatives for financial mismanagement and incompetence. After demands for new elections grew, he created the 75-seat Council last June, retaining one-third of the seats for his appointees.

The government is "doing no more than adopting a democratic slogan void of democratic content in practice," Abdullah Nibari, a leader of the Kuwaiti Democratic Forum, told a news conference after the rally.

Chemicals in destroyed Iraqi arsenal:

Iraq's missile arsenal destroyed by a UN inspection team last week included warheads that could have contained chemicals had they been finished, the team leader disclosed Monday.

"Some warheads, about 10, had they been completed could have been filled with chemicals," said US Army Col. Douglas Englund.

Iraq has revealed 30 chemical warheads among a large stock of chemical weapons it detailed to the UN Special Commission. Another inspection team will travel soon to Iraq to deal with that stock.

Four separate groups are dismantling Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapon capabilities, and ballistic missiles with range of more than 95 miles (150 kilometers).

Englund was in Bahrain, the special commission's regional headquarters, to prepare a report on his team's performance. Television broadcasts have shown bulldozers crushing the 61 missiles at a desert site outside Baghdad.

"I thought I'd detect some hostility," Englund, who went into Baghdad with his 21-member team right after the June 28 shooting incident, said in an interview.

US asks Israel to give up enclave:

The US State Department on Monday called on Israel to abandon its security zone inside Lebanon that was set up to keep Palestinian guerrillas from mounting raids on Israeli targets.

The department said Israel and Lebanon would be better off if the Lebanese army took over the enclave. It is patrolled by Israeli troops and the South Lebanon Army, a 3,000-man militia armed and paid by Israel.

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens said Sunday, "Our control over the area is vital to insuring the security of the north of the country." He and other Israeli officials said the zone would not be abandoned.

Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 to drive Palestinian guerrillas from their bases. Israel then withdrew in 1985 but kept control of the zone near the border.

Palestinians attempted 33 infiltrations from 1988 through the first half of this year. Thirty-two Israeli soldiers died in clashes. However, Arens said Sunday, no Israeli civilians have been killed.

S Africa signs NPT:

South Africa, long accused by anti-apartheid activists of having a nuclear weapons programme, signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Monday, allowing inspection of all its facilities.

Foreign Minister Pik Botha signed the accession to the treaty at a ceremony attended by visiting British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, who said he was delighted.

"This step South Africa has taken marks a big advance in the history of this particular treaty," Hurd told reporters. Both announced last month that South Africa intended to reverse years of opposition and sign the treaty.

US to lift sanctions on S Africa:

President Bush is expected to announce this week an end to the 5-year-old US economic sanctions against South Africa, saying that country has taken the required steps toward ending apartheid, administration sources said.

One senior administration official said Monday the timing of the announcement was up to Bush but could come Thursday, when the president will be at his vacation home in Kennebunkport, Maine.

He said the announcement would occur while Congress is in session to forestall criticism from supporters of sanctions that Bush was trying to slip his action through while lawmakers were out of town.

Congress enacted the sanctions in 1986 over then-President Reagan's veto. Under the law, the administration must certify that South Africa has released all political prisoners before sanctions can be lifted.

The South African government says that virtually all such prisoners have been free. But the African National Congress, a major black opposition group, says about 900 remain jailed.

Soviet hurricane destroys bridges:

Hurricane-force winds in the Soviet Union's Southern Republic of Georgia have destroyed bridges, washed away dikes and brought down power lines, the official Tass news agency said Monday.

It said the storms had battered the region around the city of Batumi, on the shores of the Caspian Sea, leaving half the city without water and forcing the closure of its oil refinery.

The storms had also flattened orchards and plantations, Tass said, but did not specify when the damage had been caused.

Bush, Kaifu to hold talks:

President George Bush and Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu are to hold free ranging talks in Kennebunkport, Maine, Thursday, ahead of the summit of industrialized nations in London next week.

Officials here said there was no prepared agenda for the informal talks, which would cover both bilateral and international concerns and preparations for the summit opening Monday.

The officials raised the possibility of agreement on a Bush trip to Japan, as Kaifu has flown to meet Bush on five previous occasions. A Japanese diplomat said there was "a good possibility of Bush visiting this year."

Gorbachev gets support from G-7 meet:

President Mikhail Gorbachev won the support of leaders of the main Soviet republics on Monday for his strategy for next week's meeting with western leaders in London.

"A big measure of agreement was achieved," he told Soviet television. "I go (to London) not only with my own personal convictions and conclusion, but with the general agreement of all the participants in this process, of the union republics."

Gorbachev will present his case for western aid and investment to help the Soviet Union convert to a market economy to leaders of the group of seven (G-7) major industrial nations on July 17.

New mosque in Tashkent:

A group of young builders from Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, has finished the construction of a new mosque. A year ago these young men collected the necessary means among the Muslims of the Uzbek Capital and being blessed by Mufti Muhammad Sadek Muhammad Yusuf Chairman of the Muslim Board for Central Asia started the construction.

In a similar way new mosques are being erected in dozens of Soviet cities. Thanks to the activity of Muslim communities the number of the operating Mosques in the USSR has grown more than six times in the past two years and topped 2,500.



ISLAMABAD : Kashmiri women, demanding that the Indian government withdraw from Kashmir, protesting in front of the Indian Embassy in Islamabad are detained by police July 8. —AFP photo

Assam to free 650 separatists in exchange of 14 hostages

GAUHATI, (India), July 9: The government in the Indian state of Assam said on Monday it would free hundreds of people detained for subversive activities in exchange for the release of a Soviet engineer and 13 other hostages, reports Reuter.

Maoist separatists have threatened to kill Soviet Mining Adviser Gristeno Sarekvi and Indian geophysicist Pholanath Jaiswal by 6 p.m. (1330 GMT) today unless six of its jailed leaders are freed.

The two men were kidnapped along with 13 Indian officials last Monday. One Indian hostage was released the following day.

Hiteswar Saikia, Chief Minister in the troubled northeastern state, said that 757 people detained under the Terrorist and Destructive Activities Prevention Act would be freed in stages beginning today.

The first to be released will be those with no serious charges against them, including three of the jailed leaders of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Saikia said.

Saikia said ULFA should release all 14 hostages the moment the first detainees are freed.

ULFA is fighting what it calls Delhi's exploitation of the oil-and tea-producing state. If India's Himalayan border state of Kashmir, Muslim militants have threatened to kill a top executive of the Indian Oil Corporation if six of its jailed members are not freed by today.

AP from New Delhi adds: The government of Assam state will release 650 supporters of a separatist group in exchange for the freedom of 14 people, including a Soviet citizen, taken hostage by the organisation, news reports said Tuesday.

The announcement was made on Monday by the top elected official in the north-eastern state, Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia.

"It is not a prestige issue, nor is it a question of victory or loss" The Times of India newspaper quoted Saikia as saying. The key issue is to work towards establishing peace in the state."

Saikia also declared a general amnesty for the United Liberation Front of Assam, the organisation which has been fighting for independence from India for the past two years. The front says native Assamese are being swamped by Bengali-speaking immigrants from other parts of India and neighbouring Bangladesh.

It says also that the natural wealth of Assam, a tea-growing and oil-producing area, does not reach the Assamese people.

Members of the group took 14 people hostage July 1, a day after Saikia took office. Saikia's Congress party had won last month's elections to the state legislature.

The hostages included a Soviet mining consultant, identified as Sergei Gritchenko, and 13 government officials.

The group had threatened to kill two of the hostages if six jailed comrades were not released by Tuesday evening.

Saikia said he had sought to tempt subsequent demands by the militants by releasing all their jailed members. He said he hoped all the hostages would be released simultaneously and peace talks initiated with the militants.

Meanwhile, the kidnapers of a top government executive said in the northern state of Kashmir that they would kill the hostage if six jailed colleagues were not released by 1 p.m. (0730 GMT) Tuesday.

Princess Sirindhorn of Thailand has won the Philippines' 1991 Ramon Magsaysay Public Service Award for helping the poor and disabled, the Award Foundation said Tuesday.

"She is recognised for making her royal office an instrument of enlightened endeavour for Thailand..." it said in a statement.

Through a foundation, the Princess had cared for many Thai orphans and unwanted children.

"Deaf and blind children. In Thailand now have special schools and thousands of pupils in remote border areas receive nutritious lunches and learn self-reliance by growing their own vegetables," the statement said.

The Princess is the daughter of Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej, whose programme of turning opium farmers into fruit and vegetable growers won the 1988 Magsaysay Award for a Royal development project.

She will come to Manila on August 31 to receive a gold medal, a certificate, and 30,000 dollars, the award foundation said.

JAL pilots on strike for hiring foreigners

TOKYO, July 9: Nearly 1,400 pilots and flight attendants of Japan Airlines (JAL) went on strike today to protest at the carrier's plans to hire more foreigners and reduce the number of pilots in a new airtliner, a JAL spokeswoman said.

JAL was forced to cancel 23 flights, including four international flights, affecting some 3,000 domestic and foreign passengers.

World refugee population tops 18m: US

Fighting in Iraq, Liberia and Somalia helped boost the number of international refugees to more than 18 million, while at least another 20 million people are displaced within their own countries, the US Committee for Refugees reported, says AP.

The committee, a private organisation that defends the rights of refugees and displaced persons, said in its 1991 "World Refugee Survey" that it counted 16.7 million cross-border refugees at the end of last year, up from 15.1 million at the end of 1989.

By early May, the committee estimated that the refugee population had swelled to 18.3 million.

It said 1.3 million Iraqis mostly Kurds and Shiite Muslims who had unsuccessfully rebelled against Saddam Hussein had fled to Iran.

US seeks inspection of atomic sites Baghdad admits trying to develop nuclear arms

WASHINGTON, July 9: Iraq has reversed earlier denials and disclosed for the first time that it is carrying out a nuclear weapons programme, including the production of enriched uranium, US, and international officials said Monday, reports AP.

The Iraqi admission was contained in an Arabic-language document. State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler offered few details about the document's contents because translation into English had not been completed.

"We understand that ... Saddam Hussein's government admits Iraq was engaged in a nuclear weapons programme contrary to previous repeated denials of the Iraqi government," she said.

She called the document "a step forward" but added that the United States will judge Saddam's pledges to eliminate nuclear and other weapons by actions not words.

The Iraqi statement appeared to confirm US claims that Iraq has been violating terms of a UN Security Council resolution which ended the Gulf War. Late last month, President Bush had warned of military action against Iraqi nuclear facilities if Iraq refused to comply with the resolution.

Renter adds: The white House said on Monday that Iraq had admitted it was trying to develop nuclear weapons and urged Baghdad to let an international team inspect Iraqi atomic sites without interference.

Senior White House officials were encouraged but still sceptical of Iraqi intentions after Iraq turned over to the United Nations and the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) a 29-page document detailing Iraq's nuclear materials.

Officials said the document, written in Arabic, listed eight specific nuclear sites in Baghdad area. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said the document was still being translated and analysed, but he added:

400 bureaucrats join sit-in in Nepal

KATHMANDU, July 9: More than 400 civil servants joined their union leaders in a sit-in protest here yesterday to demand wage increases and benefit improvements, witnesses said, reports AP.

Civil servants responding to the call from the Nepal Civil Servants' Organisation (NSCO) for protest action include employees from the communications, justice and law ministries, an NSCO spokesman said.

The 12 central committee members of the NSCO began the sit-in at the ministry of general administration Saturday to press for higher wages, transport allowances, health services, housing benefits, education facilities and an end to government harassment of union activists.

The country's opposition political parties pressed the government in parliament Sunday to solve the union's problems.

Meanwhile, the ruling Nepal congress has issued a statement urging the civil servants to stop their protest and wait for proposals expected from Nepal's new Pay Commission.

"It is regretted that some civil servants are agitating for more facilities at a time when the country is beset with serious economic problems", the statement said, adding that the government was setting up the Pay Commission to improve civil servants' conditions.

Another union, the pro-democratic Nepal Civil Servants' Association has asked the left-wing NSCO to cooperate with the government and wait for their demands to be met.

Man who tried to smuggle alleged Rajiv's killers flown to Delhi

NEW DELHI, July 9: A man detained in Nepal on suspicion of trying to smuggle two key members of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination team abroad has been flown from Kathmandu to New Delhi, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said Monday, reports AP.

The agency said the suspect, believed to be a Sri Lankan Tamil, was flown here late Sunday night by Indian officials of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) team investigating the May 21 assassination.

Sunday officials in Kathmandu had denied all knowledge of any arrest in connection with the Gandhi case, and PTI quoted Indian embassy officials there as saying the issue was "very sensitive."

Off the Record

Film that sends dollars rolling

LOS ANGELES: "Terminator 2: Judgment Day" exploded at the box office with a record-breaking weekend haul estimated at \$2.8 million dollars, industry sources said, reports AP.

The sequel the hit 1984 science-fiction movie brought back stars Arnold Schwarzenegger, this time as a good robot, and brave mom Linda Hamilton.

The Austrian-born Schwarzenegger plays a protective cyborg sent to save a 13-year-old boy from an evil cyborg sent to kill the child. The boy is destined to be a leader against robots of the future.

The pyrotechnical adventure is poised to break the five-day debut record set over the 1989 Thanksgiving weekend by "Back to the Future Part II," which took 43 million dollars.

"Batman" made 42.7 million dollars over a three-day weekend in June 1989.

"Terminator 2" is reportedly one of the costliest movies ever made: production of the Caroleo Pictures film was rumored to have reached up to \$100 million. Caroleo has refused to confirm or deny estimates.

Elephant's rage

Tokyo: An Elephant at a Japanese zoo trampled her keeper to death apparently because she disliked her new cage, reports Reuter on Tuesday.

The 3.5-tonne elephant named Izumi had been transferred only a week ago to her new cage at the zoo in Kiryu, about 100 km (63 miles) north of Tokyo.

Izumi crushed the head of her 63-year-old keeper, who had looked after her since she came to Kiryu in 1964.

USSR floating on oil

MOSCOW: The oil resources in the USSR are twice as big as in Saudi Arabia. They make up 70 billion tons, approximately a third of the world's known resources, reports IAN.

These data were announced at the conference "Oil and International Relations in the '90s" which took place in the USA.

Out of the 2,200 discovered deposits in the USSR only half are being exploited. In 1989-90, oil output in the USSR dropped from 624 million to 570 million tons a year and the Soviet exports of crude oil went down from 144 million tons in 1988 to 109 million tons in 1990.

This year, they will apparently slide to 70 million tons. This is to be explained by over-exploitation of the largest and paying deposits in the '70s and the first half of the '80s as well as by the wear and tear of the equipment (50) and the general technological backwardness of the industry. Some experts believe that if the situation continues the USSR may turn with time from an exporter into an importer of oil.



JOHANNESBURG (South Africa) : British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd (R) shakes hands with African National Congress President Nelson Mandela at ANC headquarters here July 8. The two leaders said there was much common ground in their meeting although differences remained on economic sanctions. —AFP photo