

International

France to expel 75,000 foreigners

PARIS, July 20 : France on Friday ordered its regional administrators to issue residency papers to 25,000 political asylum seekers and prepare to expel 75,000 others, Interior Ministry sources said, reports Reuter.

Prime Minister Edith Cresson announced the move earlier this month but the nationwide order to the administrators, or prefects, gave the greenlight to carry them out.

The action is likely to create US to sell \$546m arms to Arab countries

WASHINGTON, July 20 : The United States said on Friday it planned to sell 546 million dollars' worth of weapons to Oman, Egypt and Morocco, including 20 F-16s to modernise Morocco's air force, reports Reuter.

All three Arab countries were supporters of the US-led military coalition against Iraq in the Gulf War.

BRIEFLY

Iraq drives US relief workers: Iraq has driven US relief workers from the southern marshlands, where they were aiding thousands of refugees fleeing possible persecution by the Baghdad regime, the State Department said Friday, AFP reports from Washington.

"After allowing executive delegation (Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan) to visit the marsh region last week, Iraqi authorities expelled the UN relief workers Sadruddin had placed there and they reinstated the military blockade of the area," said spokesman Richard Boucher.

Canada welcomes Winnie's visit :

Canada has agreed to waive the Immigration Act to allow Winnie Mandela to vacation in the country while she is appealing a six-year jail sentence in South Africa, reports AP from Ottawa.

Immigration Minister Bernard Valcourt, after consulting the External Affairs Department, has agreed to issue the wife of South African anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela a ministerial permit, department spokesman Gerry Maffre confirmed Friday.

2 Croatian policemen killed :

Unidentified assailants killed two Croatian policemen and wounded five others Friday during an armed clash between Serbian and Croatian nationalists in the village of Siraca, east of Zagreb, the Croatian news agency Hina reported, AFP from Zagreb says.

The two policemen, identified as Ivica Silkovic and Zeljko Ciric, died after they had been taken to a hospital.

Meanwhile Croatian television said that six people, including a nine-year-old girl and an old man, were wounded in an "attack by terrorists" from the village of Mirkovci on the town of Vinkovci, in Slavonia, a Croatian region with a large Serbian minority.

Another electrical problem hits Atlantis : NASA on Friday encountered new electrical trouble with space shuttle Atlantis, this time in the firing circuit used to separate the orbiter from the external fuel tank during ascent, AP from Cape Canaveral says.

The circuit failed to work properly during testing, and workers discovered a damaged wire in the rear compartment. It was not known whether the latest problem would delay Tuesday's launch, NASA spokeswoman Lisa Malone said. The wire will need to be repaired or replaced, she said.

It is the third equipment problem this week for Atlantis.

An electronic component in the ship's solid rocket booster system was replaced Thursday after those firing circuits failed to give readings. There also was a problem with testing circuits for one of 23 units that link the shuttle's main computers and major components.

4-month workers' strike goes in Peru :

Peru's four-month-old health strike was suspended Friday, health officials said, as 70,000 state health workers agreed to return to work in exchange for pay raises, reports AP from Lima.

The ending of the health workers' strike follows that of 4,500 state social security doctors, who returned to work July 2. Some 270,000 teachers, civil construction workers and tax collection workers are still on strike for higher pay.

The workers, who began their strike March 15, said they would suspend their strike for 90 days while pay negotiations continued with the government.

Meanwhile, the workers accepted increases of between drs 50 and drs 75. Before the increases, most health workers earned on average the equivalent of drs 50.

"I thank all the sectors of the health workers who have reached an agreement," Health Minister Victor Yamamoto told reporters Friday night. "Let's stop looking at the past and look to the future."

But the health workers' union accepted the increases only on a temporary basis, claiming wages were still too low to cope with a monthly inflation rate bordering 10 per cent.

Iraq accuses Iran of aiding violence : Iraqi authorities Friday accused Iran of stirring up violence in Iraq's northern Kurdish areas and said several "infiltrators" had been arrested, AFP from Nicosia reports.

"Iranian elements, and others hired by Iran infiltrated across the border," Iraqi Minister of Information and Culture Hamed Youssef Hammadi said, according to an Iranian News Agency dispatch monitored in Cyprus.

UN officials said in Geneva that some 500 people had been killed or wounded in fierce clashes between Iraqi troops and Kurdish residents of the cities of Sulaymaniyah and Arbil in northeastern Iraq over the past two days.

Baker seeks Fahd's support on peace talks:

US Secretary of State James A Baker III is looking for support from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia on a US formula for Arab-Israeli negotiations, AP from Cairo says.

Since Egypt and Syria are already on board, Baker's chances of succeeding are good. But he may have a tougher time persuading the king to end the Arab economic boycott of the Jewish state.

Saudi Arabia, with its oil wealth and Muslim holy places, commands respect in the Arab world. Its explicit approval of US President Bush's formula for a peace conference and even a hint that it would stop trying to strangle Israel's economy could be crucial.

King Hussein of Jordan, for instance, has not committed himself on peace talks with Israel. And Baker's attempts to shatter the boycott earlier in the year were rejected — not only by the Arabs but by Israel because part of the deal Baker proposed would be a freeze on new Jewish settlements. Israel also has not welcomed the US plan, but Arab cooperation could pressure Jerusalem to compromise.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak endorsed the trade after talking to Baker in Alexandria.

Iraq tried to build 2 huge superguns

2,500 taken prisoner, six tanks destroyed by Kurds

ZAKHO (Iraq), July 20 : Kurds and Iraqi officials agreed on Friday to end fighting in northern Iraq reported to have caused hundreds of casualties, a Kurdish official said, reports Reuter.

They agreed to stop fighting Kemal Kirkukli, a senior official of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), told Reuter in this northern Iraqi town.

Kirkukli said tension had spilled into the former allied security zone from which western troops withdrew on Monday, but there had been no actual fighting there.

Kirkukli said he had no accurate casualty figures on clashes in the northern Iraqi towns of Irbil and Sulaimaniyah this week.

But he said 2,500 Iraqis, including 70 officers, had been taken prisoner and six Iraqi tanks had been destroyed and 11 captured. The prisoners were being held in Sulaimaniyah.

Kirkukli said KDP leader Masoud Barzani, engaged in autonomy negotiations in Baghdad, had ordered factions grouped in the Kurdistan front to send a delegation to Sulaimaniyah.

Both delegations tried to stop the problem from getting bigger," he said.

Kirkukli said Kurdish rebels seized 10 Iraqi Republican Guard officers inside the former allied zone on Friday.

The officers were on their way from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's summer palace at Sirasen to Dahuk, just outside the zone, and were taken to KDP headquarters at Sulaimaniyah.

"We are still optimistic we will come to an agreement," he said of the autonomy negotiations in Baghdad.

Kirkukli said the situation in Irbil and Sulaimaniyah had returned to normal after the clashes, but the Iraqis appeared to be strengthening their forces in Irbil and digging trenches near Shaykhan.

"We have called in reinforcements for Dahuk" he added, but did not elaborate.

haven set up in April after two million Kurds fled to Turkey and Iran.

But they allowed a small contingent of Iraqi Republican Guards to remain in Saddam's summer palace.

Kirkukli also said Kurds stopped an Iraqi military truck heading towards Zawita on Friday but later left it.

"We have not yet reached an autonomy agreement, but the Kurdish people are alert and conscious against any intrusion by Iraqi trucks and soldiers," he said.

"We told them to never wander in this area again unless Kurdish rebels freed the 10 officers and accompanied them to the town of Firdas, an Iraqi military training base south of Dahuk."

The United States and its European allies have banned Iraqi troops and aircraft from entering the former refugee

haven set up in April after two million Kurds fled to Turkey and Iran.

Another report from United Nations adds: Iraq has admitted it was trying to build two huge so-called superguns and has declared their components to the United Nations, diplomats said on Friday.

Western intelligence had long suspected Iraq was building such a long-range weapon capable of firing shells more than 1,000 km (600 miles) but suspected it was not ready for use.

Iraq had denied it possessed such a weapon but on Friday filed a document with the UN special commission in charge of scrapping Baghdad's weapons of mass destruction.

In the document Iraq declared components for two superguns, including a 52.2 metre (172 feet) barrel of 350 mm calibre and tubing for a 1,000 mm calibre weapon, the diplomats said.

Iraq said the site for its tests was at Jabal Mamra, 150 km (90 miles) north of Baghdad.

Suu Kyi a symbol of democracy'

CANBERRA, July 20 : Australia has condemned the six-month extension of house arrest in Rangoon of Aung San Suu Kyi, describing her as the symbol of Burma's hopes for democracy, reports AFP.

In a statement, Foreign Minister Gareth Evans called on Burma's military leaders to release Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, former General Secretary of the National League for Democracy (NLD), who was arrested two years ago today.

He recalled that more than a year had passed since Burma's general election, in which the NLD won almost 60 per cent of the vote and more than 80 per cent of the seats.

The 1990 election result revealed that Aung San Suu Kyi was seen as synonymous with a new beginning and a new hope for Burma, Evans said. "She is the symbol of the popular aspiration for democratic change in Burma."

Evans called on General Saw Maung and other members of the Burmese State Law and Order Reform Council (SLORC) to release Aung San Suu Kyi and other political leaders and to work together with them in the essential and urgent task of democratisation and reconstruction in Burma."

ASEAN greets Cambodian National Council

KUALA LUMPUR, July 20 : Members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) announced here Friday that they would accredit representatives to Cambodia's Supreme National Council (SNC).

In a statement released just before a two-day annual meeting, the ASEAN foreign ministers said that they felt it now necessary to recognise the SNC because the council was "constituted and functioning."

ASEAN groups: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

The ASEAN ministers said that it was important that all efforts be made to ensure that the current momentum towards peace in Cambodia is maintained, and they urged international support for the SNC.

Thanu, the woman suicide bomber who blew up Gandhi at an election rally near Madras on May 21, police said.

Police have yet to trace Sivarasan, a one-eyed Sri Lankan Tamil rebel, or a woman called Subha, an alleged stand-by assassin.

The explosives could have been meant for Sri Lankan Tamil guerrillas, the police said.

Indian investigators believe the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) planned Gandhi's murder. The LTTE has denied involvement.

Officials say the LTTE never forgave Gandhi for sending Indian troops to Sri Lanka on an abortive peacekeeping mission when he was Prime Minister in 1987. The troops ended up fighting the LTTE before they were withdrawn last year.

Authorities have so far arrested 14 people, most of them from Sri Lanka and the rest from Tamil Nadu, whose coast is close to the island.

Off the Record

Perestroika keeping Gorbachev fit

LONDON : Mikhail Gorbachev says perestroika is keeping him fit, reports AP.

The Soviet President and his wife Raisa went to the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, on Thursday night but left after the first act of "La Cenerentola" because Gorbachev wanted more time to talk with Prime Minister John Major.

Jeremy Isaacs, the opera house general director, said in an interview afterward: "I congratulated Gorbachev on looking so well with all the burdens he has."

"The president told me, 'Perestroika is keeping me young and fit and you should do the same."

Perestroika, or restructuring, is the slogan of Gorbachev's economic programme.

The Gorbachevs arrived at the opera house 15 minutes before the start of Gioacchino Rossini's jolly opera, based on the Cinderella story.

Isaacs said Gorbachev remarked to him: "It's a great pleasure to get away from the real world into fantasy."

"I said to him: 'Mr. President, this is the real world for me, trying to make the Royal Opera House pay its way."

The 153-year-old opera house, which claims to present more opera and ballet performances than any other house in the world, has been facing a 5 million pounds (dls 8.3 million) deficit.

The Gorbachevs and the Majors were given a standing ovation lasting nearly two minutes when they stepped into the royal box.

No doubt mindful of Gorbachev's appeal for Western assistance, there were some giggles in the audience when Don Magnifico, father of the two ugly sisters, complained of poverty: "Half my palace is on its last legs, the rest is looking shabby."

There were cheers and clapping as the Gorbachevs came and went, and some catcalls by supporters of the Baltic republics seeking independence from the Soviet Union.

Isaacs said that as Gorbachev left, he said that he and his wife were disappointed that they were leaving early.

"I had forgotten that act one ends with a remark about sitting down to dinner, so it was appropriate," Isaacs said.

Life hell without servants

KUWAIT : Fatima Rabah's life is hell. "We just can't live without servants," says the Kuwaiti mother of two. "My life has been a misery since the Iraqis invaded our country," reports Reuter.

To some Kuwaitis grown rich on the Emirate's oil wealth, putting out the rubbish or making their own breakfast feels like a dirty act, an affront to their self-esteem.

They used to wait on by cheap domestic labour from India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Bangladesh. But thousands of servants fled the country during the Iraqi occupation and have not returned.

Many Kuwaitis resolved to become more self-reliant. Women who had never worked before took cookery courses while in exile in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

But other Kuwaitis are not enjoying doing the chores round the house one bit.

"I have been waking up at nights to fix milk bottles for my younger baby," Rabah said. "I haven't slept well for months."

Even modest Kuwaiti households were used to at least one servant. Women competed over who had the largest domestic staff. Cooking, cleaning, even raising children — all these activities were beyond the experience of many Kuwaitis.

Animals have peculiarities

MOSCOW : Many birds and beasts have funny habits. Cats, for instance, like Valeriana. Magpies steal shiny things. Mice chew tobacco whenever they find it, and fall into trances. They lose their bearings and sway from side to side. Apes, too, like tobacco. Two chimpanzees of the Johannesburg zoo are avid smokers. They hold cigarettes and inhale smoke like humans. As they have no matches, the animals use visitors' stubs to light their cigarettes, which they are given in plenty, reports IAN.

Birds have special use for tobacco. Jackdaws pick up cigar stubs to fumigate their wings.

South African elephants have at least one drinking bout a year, when marula plums are ripe and bursting with intoxicating juice. A tipsy elephant turns on one spot, trying to stand on one foot.

Marmots are music-lovers. Whenever they are near a playing radio set, they stand motionless for hours on end, listening.

There are tigers eating chocolates, rats gobbling rubber, dogs who enjoy the stink of rotten meat, and other animals with peculiar ways, which zoologists term myrmecomania, from myrmex, the Greek for ant. The word comes from "crows", "blackbirds" and "turkeys' inexplicable habit of getting into anthills for insects to run under their feathers. It waits for an explanation to this day, as do other manifestations of myrmecomania.

So animals, like humans, have their peculiarities.



BAMBAN RIVER (Philippines): Children smeared with mud from the volcanic mudflow gather boulders which they will sell for eight pesos per sack (30 US cents) along the river Friday. A portion of a collapsed bridge lies in the river after it was washed away by fresh mudflow triggered by heavy rains from the Mount Pinatubo volcano.

Rajiv's killer found dead, 100 boxes explosives recovered

NEW DELHI, July 20 : The

body of a man accused of helping the killers of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was found Saturday hanging from a tree near a house where the police were holding him, news reports said, reports AP.

Investigators suspect the suicide attack that killed the assassin, Gandhi and 16 others was masterminded by Sri Lankan Tamil separatists, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.