

France to expel 75,000 foreigners

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

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

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 Reuters.

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

are major political controversy in France. French rightists oppose allowing the 25,000 to stay while leftists are against expelling the 75,000.

The 100,000 foreigners involved, most of them from the Third World, are people whose political asylum applications were rejected because authorities found they were fleeing poor economic conditions rather than political persecution.

Cresson caused a national row this month when she refused to rule out special deportation flights for people found to be in France illegally. Liberals say the move smacks of racism. The only past example of such flights was for residents of Mali, a black African state.

Officials told reporters the prefects were told to give residence papers to people to whose asylum request were rejected but who had arrived in France before 1989, had not been involved in acts of public disorder and were employed or had good chances of getting a job.

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 Reuters.

"They agreed to stop fighting, Kemal Kirkukli, a senior official of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), told Reuters 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 Sulaimaniya 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 Sulaimaniya.

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 Sulaimaniya.

"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 Sirsenk to Dahuk, just outside the zone, and were taken to KDP headquarters at Zawita, 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 Faidah, 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.

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 go.

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

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

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

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 Mamrayn, 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 Ghandhi at an election rally near Madras on May 21, police said.

Police have yet to trace Sivaraman, 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.



KRANJ (Yugoslavia): Yugoslav army soldiers man a heavy artillery piece during an exercise in federal barracks in Slovenia Friday. According to the Thursday's Federal Presidency statement army troops should withdraw from Slovenia within three months. —AFP photo

'Rangoon a hell for human rights'

US to impose economic sanctions on Burma

BANGKOK, July 20: Calling Burma "a hell for human rights," a US senator announced that US President Bush had decided to impose economic sanctions against the military-run Southeast Asian nation, reports AP.

"This action will again affirm that the people of the United States stand together with the Burmese people, and against the brutal dictatorship that enslaves them," Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan said in a statement received Saturday.

In his statement to the US senate, Moynihan also lauded opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who Saturday began her third year under house arrest in the Burmese capital Rangoon.

Moynihan sponsored a section of the US Customs and Trade Act of 1990 which required the US president to impose sanctions against Burma if certain conditions were not met by that country.

These conditions include cooperation in efforts to curb the heroin and opium trade, the release of political prisoners, the end of martial law and

the transfer to power by the military to a civilian government.

The US State Department has estimated some 2,000 Burmese have been detained for political reasons.

Rangoon residents say Suu Kyi, the daughter of Aung San, the legendary hero of Burma's independence struggle against Britain, lives a Spartan life and is not allowed visitors to her home on University Avenue in Rangoon.

Suu Kyi, 46, was swept into prominence during the nationwide pro-democracy uprising in 1988. The nation of 41 million has been ruled by the military since it overthrew a civilian government in 1962.

Moynihan said he had been notified by the US State Department that the Bush administration has decided to implement economic sanctions against Burma. His statement did not say when the sanctions would be imposed.

The State Department could not be immediately reached for details.

The US market will not

remain open to Burma as long as it remains a hell for human rights," he said.

Moynihan said the State Department listed the refusal to renew a bilateral textile agreement with Burma as the first sanction that would be imposed. Of Burma's 22 million dollars in exports to the United States in 1990, textiles accounted for 9 million dollars.

Moynihan said the State Department has assured him it would continue to urge other countries to impose economic sanctions. The United States and the European Community already have an arms embargo on Burma.

The senator, who is a member of the Senate committee on Foreign Relations, said the US congress would continue to work to increase pressure on the Burmese regime.

He said there were plans to "shame the dictators of Burma before the entire world community" at the annual meeting of the US General Assembly this fall.

According to Burma's military Suu Kyi is allowed to leave Burma anytime she wants

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.

N Shanmugam, a confessed smuggler who was arrested Wednesday, allegedly escaped Friday night from a government lodging house. United News of India quoted unnamed officials as saying.

It said Shanmugam's body was found early Saturday in a park near the house in Vedaranyam in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

"Maybe he was killed or maybe he committed suicide. It is still not certain and we should go to the bottom of this," Press Trust of India quoted an unnamed police

source as saying. Shanmugam was the 13th person to have been arrested in connection with Gandhi's May 21 assassination in a bomb blast at an election rally near Tamil Nadu's capital of Madras.

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.

Shanmugam had confessed he used to smuggle arms and radios for the Tamil Tigers from northern Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu where the rebels are known to have set up bases.

Sri Lanka is separated from India by 50 kilometres (30 miles) of Sea. Press Trust said

Shanmugam had feared the Tamil Tigers would try to kill him because he had disclosed vital information. He was also reported to be depressed after he was rebuked Friday by his uncle for being involved in the assassination.

United News said Shanmugam's death is a major setback to the investigation because he had appeared to be eager to help the police.

Another report adds: Police said more than 100 boxes of explosives and high frequency radio equipment were found in the jungle at Vedaranyam, about 500 km (300 miles) from the Tamil Nadu state capital Madras.

They had been hidden by N Shanmugam, who had arranged a reception at Vedaranyam for Sivaraman, the suspected mastermind, and

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 (dhs 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 Reuters.

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 be waited 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 cooking 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 trance. 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.

Marmosets 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 bumice rocks 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. —AFP photo