

Japan apologizes for recruiting comfort girls during WWII

TOKYO, July 7: The Japanese government, after releasing a report showing its direct involvement in running front-line brothels during World War II, apologized yesterday for recruiting women to work in them, reports Xinhua.

Koichi Kato, the top government spokesman, said at a news conference: "I would like once again to express the sincere apologies and remorse of the government of Japan to all those, irrespective of nationality or place of origin, who underwent indescribable pain and suffering as comfort women."

He added: "With this sense of deep remorse and with the determination never to repeat such a mistake, Japan will firmly uphold its position as a nation dedicated to peace and spare no effort as it strives to build a future-oriented relationship with South Korea and other Asian nations."

He said the Japanese government would give sincere consideration to redressing the hardships experienced by those who tasted the bitterness of life.

Japan would study how to best express its apologies to South Korea and would also consider the adoption of measures for other affected countries. But he said Japan regarded the issue of compensation as already having been solved by the San Francisco Peace Treaty.

The report, based on a six-month study of 127 wartime documents found in six ministries and agencies, shows the Japanese government's involvement in systematically recruiting women from Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines and Indonesia.

The spokesman said the government would continue to investigate documents concerning comfort women and would make them public.

UN, Iraq on collision course over arms inspections

UNITED NATIONS, July 7: The UN Security Council and Iraq are heading toward a collision after the council demanded permission for UN arms inspectors to search a government ministry and Baghdad's envoy defiantly refused, reports AP.

UN chemical weapons inspectors in Baghdad were maintaining a round-the-clock watch for a second day Monday at the Agriculture Ministry, suspected to contain documents and material related to Iraq's weapons programme.

Alastair Livingston, the Bahrain-based regional chief for the UN commission overseeing the destruction of Iraqi weaponry, said US Army Maj Karen Jansen and her 15-member team would remain at the building until the Iraqis back down.

The team, which includes American, Russian, British and French citizens, was staking out the ministry to prevent the possible removal of documents or other materials.

On Monday, the official Iraqi News Agency quoted Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Saadoun al-Zubaidi as saying the main goal of the UN team was to collect intelligence information. It said the team had tried to break into the building on Sunday and has "besieged" it ever since.

But in New York, the UN Security Council on Monday summoned an Iraqi official to demand that Baghdad give immediate access to the team.

In a statement, the council said that Iraq's refusal to permit access to the team was an "unacceptable breach" of the ceasefire agreement that ended the Gulf War.

The ceasefire conditions, including compliance with all UN inspections, are enforceable with military action under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. But no force was expected after the council dropped an earlier warning of "serious consequences."

Diplomats said Iraq appeared to be testing the unity and resolve of the Security Council.

Rolf Ekeus, chairman of the UN Special Commission, said inspectors believe the ministry building contains material that "has to do with their weapons procurement programme."

But Iraqi Charge d'Affaires Samir K K al-Nima said Monday he told Ekeus that "nothing in that building is related to the (relevant) section of the ceasefire resolution." Since Sunday, Iraq has refused to open the building.

"A line has to be drawn," said a defiant al-Nima after meeting with Security Council President Jose Luis Jesus, Cape Verde's UN ambassador, who holds the rotating council presidency this month.

"We do not allow inspectors inside because it is a ministry and a symbol of sovereignty," al-Nima said.

He did not, however, rule out some compromise, and diplomats said that Iraq in the past has talked tough but finally backed down.

British Ambassador David Hannay dismissed the Iraqi complaint, saying that a council resolution on long-term weapons monitoring gives the inspectors the right to see anything.

The United Nations has sparred repeatedly with Baghdad over weapons monitoring. Last September, Iraq blocked 44 arms inspectors programmes. It later backed down.

In the past it has lied about and concealed its nuclear, chemical, biological and Scud missile programmes which eventually were uncovered by UN teams.



KUALA LUMPUR: A Bangladeshi woman (L), child in hand, begs on a busy street in Kuala Lumpur while a smartly dressed Malaysian woman walks by ignoring Tuesday. A nationwide round-up of foreign beggars will be conducted soon and those picked up will be housed at illegal workers' camps. Officials said the growing number of foreign beggars were a hassle and eye-sore to tourists. — AFP/UNB photo

5 killed as troops fire on shoppers in Kashmir

SIRINAGAR, India, July 7: Troops fired on shoppers in a crowded marketplace after militants hurled a grenade at police, and five civilians were killed and 17 injured, police said Tuesday, reports AP.

The attack Monday in Khyrnar market was one of a dozen that occurred in Srinagar that day.

In such attacks, which have become commonplace in the region, militants mingling with the public attack troops, forcing them to open fire, which often kills civilians.

One soldier was killed and three were injured Monday when militants shot at troops from side streets in the city.

The violence was described by a police official in the control room of Srinagar, capital of Jammu-Kashmir state, where most of the militants in the Muslim insurgency operate. The official spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Al-Umar Mujahideen, two of the prominent rebel groups fighting to break the state away from India, claimed responsibility for the attack in the marketplace.

A 15-year-old girl died on the spot, while four others died at hospitals, the police official said. Doctors said 17 people were hospitalized, three of them in serious condition.

A smaller attack involving militants occurred Tuesday.

At least one police officer was killed and four injured when militants fired at a speeding vehicle on the outskirts of Srinagar, police said.

A spokesman for the Hizbol Mujahideen, a Muslim militant group that claimed responsibility for the attack, said five soldiers were killed and four injured.



MUNICH: G-7 First Ladies (L to R), Marie Delors, Hannelore Kohl, Mila Mulrony and Barbara Bush stroll through Munich's English Garden before lunch Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

Summit wives transported back to fairy-tale times

HOHENSCHWANGAU, GERMANY, July 7: Wives of some of the leaders at the annual economic summit were transported Tuesday to the fairy-tale world of the Bavarian Alps, reports AP.

"It's just like home," quipped US first lady Barbara Bush as she stood in the courtyard of Neuschwanstein Castle, an inspiration for the Sleeping Beauty Palace at Disneyland and an icon of German tourist posters. "No, it's really beautiful," Mrs Bush quickly added.

The outing took the wives to some of Germany's prime tourist spots, including the haunts of tragic King Ludwig II and a remote church in an Alpine meadow.

Neuschwanstein was built in 1869 on orders of Ludwig — known to detractors as a "mad monarch" but to admirers as a fairy-tale king who only wanted peace.

Perched on a peak top, the gray granite castle rises to towers, turrets and pinnacles, recalling the days of Medieval knighthood.

With Mrs Bush were Hannelore Kohl, wife of the German Chancellor and host of the annual gathering of the world's top seven leaders, Mila Mulrony and Diana Amato, wives of the Canadian and Italian Prime Ministers. The wives of French President Francois Mitterrand, Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and British Prime Minister John Major did not come to Munich for the three-day summit of the world's richest democracies.

Ludwig, who became king at age 18 in 1864, turned to building castles and palaces after losing a war to the Prussians in 1866.

The composer Richard Wagner was drawn to his court and his operas influenced some of Ludwig's constructions.

Terrier becomes national hero

WELLINGTON: A little Jack Russell Terrier became a National hero today after he saved his master following a shooting accident, reports AP.

Rex was out Sunday night with farmer Robert Wood who was shooting possums. Wood slipped on a cattletop and landed on his rifle, shooting himself in the chest.

Speaking from his hospital bed today, Wood said Rex, just seven months old, grabbed him by the ear and tried to pull him off the cattletop.

First kiss was heavenly

MAGEE, Miss: Travis Creel and Debbie Makamson may have had a down-to-earth wedding but their first kiss as newlyweds was heavenly, reports AP.

The embrace took place Sunday as the couple fell toward the earth at 120 mph (192 kph). "It was at about 7,000 or 8,000 feet (2,100 or 2,400 meters) when I smacked her on the mouf," said Creel, 46.

The Hattiesburg pair exchanged vows at Magee Airport, then boarded a small plane with parachutes strapped to their backs. They jumped out at 13,000 feet (3,900 meters), linked arms and kissed as wedding guests cheered below.

It was Creel's 2,410th jump and Makamson's first, so she was strapped to best man Mike Igo.

Makamson, 37, said she had her doubts about marrying a man who wanted her to jump out of an airplane. But love conquered all.

Baboon liver recipient, eating, walking

PITTSBURGH: The recipient of the world's first baboon-to-human liver transplant is eating meals and taking several walks a day around the hospital's intensive care unit, reports AP.

The 35-year-old man, who has requested anonymity, remained in serious condition Monday at Presbyterian University Hospital after the transplant June 28.

Doctors planned a scan of the liver this week to determine if it is growing. The baboon liver is smaller than a human liver and doctors expect it to regenerate.

Doctors have found no signs of infection or rejection of the liver.

BRIEFLY

Floods claim 113 in China: Storms which began on Friday have led to floods in the southern Chinese province Fujian, killing 113 people and injuring 88, the official New China News Agency said Tuesday, reports Reuter from Beijing.

Authorities said another 306 people were missing in some of the worst flooding the region has been in decades, the agency reported.

More than 7,000 homes collapsed. Economic losses were put at about 400 million yuan (72.53 million dollar) it said. In the southern province of Hunan, floods claimed 27 lives earlier this week, the agency said.

Floods plague China every year. Last year a long spell of torrential rain triggered its worst floods in a century.

Earthquake rocks Taiwan: A strong undersea earthquake measuring 5.3 on the open-ended Richter Scale rocked Taiwan Tuesday but no damage or casualties were immediately reported. The central weather bureau said, reports AFP from Taipei.

The tremor, which struck at 8:45 am (0045 GMT), shook high-rise buildings across the island and lasted about three minutes, the bureau said.

Its epicentre was located 48.2 kilometres (29.88 miles) north of Hualien on the east coast and was centred 28.1 kilometers (17.42 miles) below the sea, it added.

Taiwan sits on an earthquake belt but most tremors are centred under the surrounding sea, which limits their destructive strength.

Haitian children seek refuge in US: Carrying plastic American flags and little else, 101 Haitian children seeking refuge in the United States arrived in Boston Monday from the US Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, reports AP from Boston.

The group consisted mostly of teen-agers but included a 3-week-old baby. All had been separated from their families following the military coup last fall that overthrew elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The coup sent thousands of Haitians fleeing in boats to Guantanamo Bay, where many were turned away and others were held in refugee camps.

Mary Diaz, director of refugee services for Catholic Charities, said some of the children who arrived in Boston may have relatives in the United States. Others may be entirely alone.

Georgia gets UN membership: The Security Council on Monday approved UN membership for Georgia, the last of the 15 former Soviet Republic to seek its own seat at the United Nations, reports Reuter from United Nations.

The application had been delayed briefly last month by Russia, which wanted to wait for June 24 meeting between Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze and Russian President Boris Yeltsin over fighting in the enclave of south Ossetia.

Russia on Monday supported Georgia's membership in a council resolution, which was adopted unanimously. The application must be approved by the General Assembly where no difficulties are anticipated.

"All the members of the council look forward to the near future when Georgia will go to US as a member of the United Nations," the council said in a statement.

Tornado hits Panama City, 7 killed: A tornado touched down southeast Panama City Monday, leaving at least seven people dead and 30 injured and damaging dozens of buildings, emergency aid officials said, reports AFP from Panama City.

The powerful twister swirled around the Tocumen International Airport and nearby neighborhoods for about 25 minutes ripping off the roofs of houses and toppling trees and electric poles, police said.

The tornado also damaged a school and two factories, police said parts of the capital were left without electricity and telephone service, and traffic came to a halt.

Ukraine presses for administrative control over N-arms CIS to set up jt peacekeeping force

MOSCOW, July 7: The Commonwealth of Independent States has edged closer to cooperation at a summit meeting in Moscow, promising to set up a joint peace-keeping force and coordinate economic policy, reports Reuter.

"Having gained complete national independence together with the threat of complete national economic collapse, Commonwealth leaders are venturing towards a cautious, yet ever more outspoken approachment," Commonwealth Television said.

Monday's summit, the latest in a series of often acrimonious meetings between leaders of the former Soviet republics, sealed several deals to help some states overcome the ethnic strife and economic troubles threatening to tear them apart.

But participants shied away from a number of contentious issues. They postponed a debate on who should control strategic nuclear weapons in Ukraine, a question with troubling security implications for the West.

At present only Russian President Boris Yeltsin has operational control over nuclear, missiles.

Ukraine is pressing for administrative control over the strategic nuclear weapons on its territory, a concept which Commonwealth military commanders say is unwelcome.

Commonwealth leaders said the proposed peace-keeping force would be used first in the former Soviet republic of Moldova, provided parliament there put in a formal request for help.

They said Moldovan President Mircea Snegur had assured his commonwealth partners that the request would come.

"I think that with joint efforts... and through parliament we will find a way out of this situation, a way to maintain a cease-fire, introduce buffer forces and work calmly in parliament to find a compromise," Snegur told reporters.

But Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, whose state is locked in a territorial conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan, said the Commonwealth had no mechanism to solve ethnic strife.

Valentina Podgornaya, a deputy from the separatist Russian — speaking Dnestr region of Moldova, said seven city councillors from the town of Dubossary were killed on Monday night by an artillery shell fired from Moldovan government forces positions.

Rebels kill 3 villagers in Philippines

COTABATO, Philippines, July 7: Three villagers, including a six-year-old boy, were killed and three injured when suspected communist rebels threw a grenade at them, police said today, reports AFP.

The six victims were waiting for a ride along a highway in Arakan town in the southern province of North Cotabato when unidentified men suspected to be members of the communist New People's Army (NPA) hurled the grenade, the police said.

Political parties to be revived in Jordan

AMMAN, Jordan, July 7: Jordan moved toward a new political era Monday after Parliament endorsed a draft law that would revive political parties banned since 1957, reports AP.

The lower house gave its approval to the legislation, which it has been debating for three weeks, by 43-9 late Sunday. The bill now must be approved by the 40-member Senate and King Hussein, but its basic principle seems certain to be ratified.

The bill was first presented two years ago amid democratic reforms introduced by Hussein following widespread riots caused by austerity measures. The unrest triggered demands for liberalization after years of martial law.

Even if the political reforms become law, political disputes seem inevitable.

At least 55 political groups have indicated that they want legal status, while the king has made it known that he prefers to limit the number of parties to five.

The proposed law would repeal the political parties law

Social democrats sweep Nigerian election

LAGOS, July 7: Nigeria's social democrats have won control of a new civilian national assembly with a dramatic victory in army-supervised elections that may provide a pointer for the choice of the country's next president, reports Reuter.

With more than 92 per cent of results from last Saturday's elections having been announced by the National Electoral Commission, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) seems set to gain control of both the Senate and House of Representatives.

Troops destroy 3 LTTE camps, kill 30

COLOMBO, July 7: The government's army and air force destroyed three Tamil rebel camps in northern Sri Lanka, killing 30 militants, the military said Tuesday, reports AP.

The fighting occurred Monday, the ninth day of a large ground and air offensive by 6,000 troops in the Jaffna peninsula, which is mostly controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The military claims 390 rebels and 37 soldiers have died in the offensive. That cannot be confirmed because of poor communication with the region, 300 kilometers (185 miles) north of Colombo.

A statement by the military headquarters said troops faced stiff resistance in Monday's fighting around Thennaratchchi village. Only nine soldiers were wounded, it said, without giving details of the attack on the three rebel camps.

Seven rebel bodies were found, and commanders said 23 fleeing guerrillas were shot to death by warplanes, the statement said.

UN steps up relief supplies to Sarajevo

WASHINGTON, July 7: The United Nations is stepping up its airlift of humanitarian relief supplies to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, spokesman Margaret Tutwiler said Monday, reports AP.

"The United Nations hopes to have 12 to 16 flights daily carrying a total of 190 metric tons of food and medicine," she said. Later, a senior UN official told reporters the UN wants to airlift at least 200 metric tons of supplies into Sarajevo each day, which should provide food and medicine for about 50,000 people.

During the first three days of the UN coordinated humanitarian assistance airlift to Sarajevo, Tutwiler said, 267.9 metric tons of adult food, 98.0 metric tons of baby food, 54.5 tons of adult medicine, and 5.0 metric tons of pediatric medicine were delivered. About 45 metric tons of US supplied ready-to-eat meals (MREs) were among the supplies delivered.

American aircraft made four flights to Sarajevo, she said, as part of the UN "rotation" of planes carrying relief supplies to the Bosnian capital.

The airlift operated throughout the weekend and relief workers have been able to get supplies from the airport into Sarajevo for distribution, the spokesman said, adding it takes an average of 30 minutes to offload the aircraft and another 60 minutes to transport the supplies to distribution centres in Sarajevo.

United Nations officials "remain very concerned about situation" in and around Sarajevo, where shelling and sniper fire by Serbian forces continued although the levels of firing "are down since shortly before the night and subsiding during the day," Tutwiler said. "There has been continued sporadic shelling against targets in the vicinity of the airport itself," she said, noting that fighting also continued in northern parts of Bosnia.

She said the United States and other countries participating in the humanitarian airlift share the concern voiced by UN officials. "You don't want your people hurt while trying to help others," Tutwiler said, noting that several UN workers "have been very close" to incoming Serbian fire.

In addition to the airlift, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) planned four land convoys into Bosnia on July 6 with another four convoys planned for July 8, the spokesman said. Each convoy was to consist of five trucks.

The spokesman was critical of the July 3 unilateral declaration by a leader of the main Bosnian-Croat political party announcing the formation of a Croatian "canton" within Bosnia with Mostar as its capital. She noted that the president of Bosnia has rejected the move, adding that the attitude of other Bosnian Croat leaders and that of the Bosnian Croat community toward the announcement was not clear.

Reiterating the basic principles the United States attaches to "evolving situations of this type," Tutwiler emphasized "We're not trying to resolve the political situation on the ground." The United States "will respect decisions that are made peacefully and democratically," she said. Such decisions must be in accord with the principles of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and there must be equal treatment of minorities and respect for fundamental human rights. "The United States has consistently opposed any forcible changes in borders," she said.

"It is for the people of the area to resolve questions about their future peacefully and through negotiation," the spokesman said. "But any forcible, unilateral act certainly does not meet the criteria that I just enunciated—peaceful, negotiated, non-forcible."

Iran to send 3000 pilgrims to Mecca each week

NICOSIA, July 7: Iran said on Monday it will send 3,000 Muslims of pilgrimage to Mecca each week from next month, reports Reuter.

Head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organisation Mohammad Hossein Rezai, quoted by the official news agency IRNA, said the Saudi government had agreed to receive 3,000 Iranians for Omra, each week.

Iran, whose ties with Saudi Arabia have warmed since it condemned Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, sent more than 118,000 pilgrims to the annual Hajj ceremonies in Mecca last month.

Rezai said 96 old Iranian pilgrims died in Mecca during this year's Hajj.