

FIS leaders' trial begins

ALGIERS, July 13: The trial of Algeria's powerful Muslim fundamentalist leaders started on Sunday with all of those accused, including two facing possible death sentences, and lawyers boycotting the hearing, reports Reuter.

Bleda Military Court adjourned briefly, then went ahead with the hearing with the prosecutor demanding it "apply the law in all its rigour," the official news agency APS said.

Abassi Madani, 61, and his deputy Ali Belhadj, 35, of the now-outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) face charges including conspiracy against the state. Five other FIS officials face lesser charges, carrying up to 20 years in prison. Belhadj is also accused of kidnapping and torturing kidnap victims.

Diplomats and Algerian commentators see the trial as a litmus test for the future direction of the divided country.

Police on alert: opposition fears fresh riots

Muslims to march towards Babri Masjid

NEW DELHI, July 13: Hundreds of gun-toting policemen on Sunday fanned out across a holy town in eastern India as Muslim groups prepared to march to a mosque where Hindu zealots are building a temple, reports AP.

The Interior Minister, SB Chavan, flew to Aydhya to see if Hindu fundamentalists, backed by the Uttar Pradesh state government, had violated court orders in starting construction work four days ago. The temple will eventually replace the 400-year-old mosque.

Politicians fear the work could trigger new nationwide Hindu-Muslim riots, similar to the one in 1990 when about 1,000 people were killed.

Thousands of religious fanatics, claiming they represent all Hindu, chanted hymns Sunday while pouring cement to build a temple for Ram, one of their gods.

Ashok Singhal, the leader of the World Hindu Council, which is spearheading the construction campaign, said "No force in this country will be able to remove us (from the site)."

Details of the Muslim protest were not immediately available.

No violence was reported at the site Sunday. Press Trust of India reported from Ayodhya, quoting police officer AK Saran.

On Saturday, Prime Minister PM Narasimha Rao conferred with political leaders and the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh state, Kalyan Singh, about halting the construction. Rao said he would take a decision after the Supreme Court gave its judgment Wednesday on a public interest petition to block the construction work.

Opposition politicians criticized Rao for "indecision and inaction" and suggested the federal government seize the land around the shrine.

The Supreme Court said any construction that violated existing court bans could be torn down.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, which came to power in Uttar Pradesh state on an election promise to build the temple, said the construction programme was restricted to a site not disputed by Hindus and Muslims.

Hindu fundamentalists claim Muslim invaders destroyed a Hindu temple 400 years ago and built the mosque. In 1949 zealots stormed the mosque and installed an idol of Hindu warrior god Ram. Since then dozens of petitions have been filed in the state high court and are still pending.

Meanwhile both houses of Parliament adjourned Monday when angry opposition lawmakers demanded a government statement on Ayodhya, a holy town where a Hindu-Muslim dispute is occurring.

The problem began in Ayodhya on Thursday, when Hindus started building a temple that would eventually uproot a nearby mosque.

On Sunday, police arrested about 120 Muslims who were marching into Ayodhya. The Muslims apparently planned to defend the mosque or to try and stop construction of the new temple.

Home Minister SB Chavan, who visited the holy town on Sunday, criticized the government of the state where Ayodhya is located for failing to provide enough security in the holy town.

But Chavan also indicated on Monday that the government would take no action until the Supreme Court rules on the dispute.

The court has been asked to order the construction halted, and a judgment is expected Wednesday.

PTI adds: The Union Home Minister, SB Chavan, today expressed dissatisfaction over security arrangements at the disputed Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri masjid complex here.

Talking to reporters after a nearly three-hour visit to the disputed site, Chavan said he was not satisfied with the security arrangement around the structure. Much more was needed to be done, he said.

Chavan said there was insufficient number of close circuit TV cameras around the shrine and the place lacked a proper police control room.

The Home Minister said the centre had decided to provide five more companies of paramilitary forces to augment security arrangements.

Iran-Contra scandal

Former CIA spy chief to face trial

WASHINGTON, July 13: Former CIA spy chief Clair George will face trial this month on charges of covering up the secret White House network that shipped arms to Nicaraguan rebels as part of the Iran-Contra affair, reports AFP.

Testimony is scheduled to begin next week. Closed hearings on the use of classified intelligence information are being held this week.

George will become the highest-ranking Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official in history to be tried on charges related to his job.

George was indicted on charges of obstructing Congress and a grand jury, and on six counts of perjury and making false statements.

BRIEFLY

AI chief killed in accident: Amnesty International's Executive Chief, Annette Fischer, 46 has died in car crash in Italy, the London-based human rights group said on Sunday, reports Reuter from London.

Fischer and her husband Carl Eli Fischer were killed in a head-on collision in heavy rain in Florence on Saturday as they returned home to Denmark after a holiday, Amnesty said.

Fischer, a Dane, was elected Chairwoman of Amnesty's ruling International Executive Committee in 1991. She was also Chairwoman of Amnesty's Danish section from 1986 to 1989.

Quake rattles Japan: An earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale shook northern Japan Sunday night, but police said there were no reports of damage or injuries, reports AP from Tokyo.

The Central Meteorological agency said the quake occurred at 8:09 pm (11:09GMT) and was centered about 90 kilometers (54 miles) under sea off Aomori prefecture (state), at the northern tip of Japan's biggest island, Honshu.

The Richter scale measures the magnitude of a quake at its epicentre, according to ground motion as recorded on seismographs. And earthquake of 6 on the Richter scale is capable of causing widespread damage near the epicentre.

Mandela to attend US convention: Nelson Mandela, leader of the African National Congress, plans to attend the Democratic Convention on Wednesday as a guest of party chairman Ronald H Brown, a party spokeswoman said Saturday, reports AP from New York.

Mandela is not scheduled to speak to the gathering, spokeswoman Ginny Terzano said.

Brown and Mandela met last year when the party chairman visited South Africa. Mandela is in New York for a United Nations meeting.

Palestinian gets life term: A Palestinian was sentenced Sunday to life in prison for stabbing a 15-year-old Israeli girl to death in Nuseirat refugee camp in the occupied Gaza Strip, pleaded guilty to attacking the girl, Helena Rapp, as she waited for a bus in the Tel Aviv suburb of Bat Yam, the report said.

The May stabbing touched off a several days of anti-Arab rioting in Bat Yam and led the army to bar all Gaza workers from entering Israel for two weeks.

Last month, the army demolished Amran's home, in which 12 family members lived, before Amran was convicted.

Mahdi supporters kill 25: More than 25 people were killed by followers of Somalia's interim President Ali Mahdi during a demonstration in Mogadishu, Aydid radio, which supports the rival faction of general Muhammad Farah Aydid, reported Sunday, says AFP from London.

The radio, quoted by the BBC, said incidents broke out in the Mahdi-held district of Kaaran during a huge rally against the constant killings and the circulation of forged money which had ruined many businesses.

The demonstrators, who had been addressed by members of the clergy and intellectuals, came under fire from supporters of the interim President, the radio said, and 27 were killed.

Gastroenteritis claims 173: At least 173 people have died of gastroenteritis in the past one month in Nepal and most of the deaths occurred in the western regions, reports AP from Kathmandu.

About 160 people died in several villages of Mugu, Jumla and Humla districts, 360 kilometers (225 miles) northwest of Kathmandu, said the assistant minister for social welfare, Hasta Bahadur Malla.

Another 13 people died in the past two weeks in the eastern district of Ramechhap, 80 kilometers (50 miles) east of Kathmandu, the state-run news agency, RSS, reported Sunday.

PRI admits defeat in Mexico: For the first time in its 63-year history as Mexico's ruling party, the PRI on Monday admitted defeat without a fight in gubernatorial elections in Mexico's largest, richest state, reports AP from Mexico.

Supporters of the main opposition party were in the streets overnight celebrating the victory of their candidate, Francisco Barrio, who claimed the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) cheated him of victory six years ago.

However, in Michoacan state, the PRI was ahead in official returns in that gubernatorial race. But the opposition, led by former presidential candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, accused the PRI of widespread fraud.



Sen Ted Kennedy (D.Mass) and his new bride Victoria Reggie arrive on Sunday at a reception given for the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial hosted by New York City Mayor David Dinkins. — AFP/UNB photo

Pope John Paul hospitalised

ROME, July 13: Pope John Paul was admitted to hospital on Sunday for tests and possible surgery on an intestinal problem, reports Reuter.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said it was not clear whether the 72-year-old Pope, who normally enjoys good health, would have to have an operation.

"The possibility cannot be ruled out," he told Vatican Radio.

An earlier statement said the Pope was going to the Gemelli clinic of the medicine and surgery faculty of Rome's sacred heart Catholic university to continue a series of tests already begun at the Vatican.

A small crowd of well-wishers saw the Pope's entourage enter the hospital shortly after 1730 GMT. "Viva il Papa," some shouted.

8 killed in Peshawar gunfight

PESHAWAR, July 13: At least eight people were killed and more than 20 wounded in a gunfight between rival Muslim sects on Sunday in northwestern Pakistan, doctors said, reports Reuter.

Witnesses said the clash flared during a traditional mourning procession by Shi'ite Muslims in the North West Frontier Province capital of Peshawar.

Earlier a government official said six people were killed as activists of the majority Sunni and minority Shi'ite sects fought with firearms, including Kalashnikov assault rifles, in the town's old Qissakhwani (story tellers) bazaar.

Doctors at a government hospital said two more people died later, raising the toll to eight.

Devout Shi'ites, beating their breasts or flailing themselves with knives, held processions in other Pakistani towns under tight security which authorities has ordered to prevent sectarian violence, witnesses said.

Government officials said the army had been put on alert in a sensitive cities for the commemoration of the martyrdom 14 centuries ago of Prophet Mohammed's (SM) grandson Imam Hussain (R).

The tight security was ordered because of several weeks of high tension between Sunni and Shi'ite sects after several people were killed in clashes between their militants.

Witnesses said armed troops guarded processions held in Pakistan's biggest city Karachi, already under army control for a crime-crackdown launched in May.

The Peshawar clash occurred when a Shia mourning procession passed a Sunni mosque, the witnesses said. Police fired teargas to disperse crowds of the rival sects.

Army and paramilitary troops later began patrolling a tense city, full of automatic weapons because of the presence of Afghan guerrillas during 14 years of Afghan civil war.

President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had issued messages on Sunday appealing for peace and asking people to be on guard against conspirators seeking to create national disunity.

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Democratic convention opens in NY

NEW YORK, July 13: The Democratic National Convention opens here Monday night, aiming to jump-start challenger Bill Clinton's bid to dethrone President Bush in this year's unusual three-way race, reports AP.

After a turbulent, triumphant primary season and weeks of buildup, Clinton's moment is at hand: Some 4,288 delegates will crowd Madison Square Garden for a four-day party that will crown him the Democratic nominee.

All was remarkably calm, for a party known best for its bitter feuds.

Clinton's choice of Tennessee Sen. Al Gore as his running mate was panned by some liberals, but for the most part was cheered for its moderate generational message.

"We have a winner," said party chairman Ronald Brown, who would be bringing down the gavel to open the festivities. "That winner is Bill Clinton. We need to get behind him and support him."

Clinton was practically out of sight on convention eve, attending church before returning to his hotel to work on his acceptance speech for Thursday. On Monday, he planned a morning visit to a century-old programme that provides health care and other services to the poor.

On Sunday, Clinton sounded the theme that will echo throughout the convention hall this week.

"(We) share a common goal of rebuilding America and putting people first," Clinton said. "Together our message of real change will restore dignity and purpose for all the American people."

Outside, workers scrubbed the plaza around the historic entertainment hall, police paced everywhere and delegates enjoyed a little sightseeing, shopping and partying before getting down to business.

As always, there were protests. Both sides in the abortion debate were massing throughout the event, as were advocates for other causes ranging from better treatment of the homeless to better treatment of women in the military.

Bush and expected independent candidate Ross Perot were lying low during the Democrats' celebration, but Republicans were on hand to critique the competition.

"Despite his claim to the contrary, Bill Clinton is a failed governor of a small state," said Republican Party chairman Rich Bond in his opening salvo.

Revelry was atop Sunday's agenda. There were parties and parties and parties, including 42 officials delegation bashes.

Once the convention is called to order, there is little to debate, a drama shortage some delegates rue. Others praise it as a chance to skip the fighting.

"It's one of the first conventions in modern times in which we are using it almost completely as a launching pad for the general election."

Cuba okays reforms

HAVANA, July 13: Cuba's National Assembly on Sunday unanimously approved a package of reforms to the island's 1976 constitution, the Cuban domestic news agency AIN said.

The 469 assembly deputies, which included President Fidel Castro, approved the constitutional changes after three days of discussions which had carefully analysed the proposed reforms.

It was the first time that alterations had been made to Cuba's one-party communist constitution since it was introduced following a national referendum 16 years ago.

Meanwhile: Cuban President Fidel Castro has called on his critics abroad to stop attacking Cuba for trying to preserve its communist system and instead tell the United States to lift its economic embargo against the island.

Cuban television on Sunday interrupted normal programming to broadcast comments made by Castro on Saturday night at a debate by Cuba's National Assembly on constitutional changes.

found the copies of the Nazi Propaganda Chiefs' diaries he hid in a forest at the end of World War Two.

Richard Otto Goebbels' personal stenographer from 1941 to 1945, told Reuter on Sunday he churned out 17,000 type-written pages based on notes dictated to him by the Nazi propagandist.

As Russian troops advanced from the east in 1945, Otto left Berlin by car with colleagues to bury microfiche copies of the diaries in the woods west of the capital of the Reich.

"They were found. The Russians must have heard about it," said the 85-year-old Otto who now lives near Bonn.

Once copied on to glass microfiche plates under Otto's supervision, the missing diaries dealing mainly with the war period apparently were shipped to Moscow, he said.

He speculated Moscow had not wanted to see them published because they contained embarrassing information, possibly on Soviet dictator Josef Stalin's lack of preparedness for the Nazi German invasion in 1941.

The London tabloid Daily Mail on Friday began serializing excerpts from the diaries, it said it had obtained them from the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich, which was concerned over reports of Irving's involvement in The Sunday Times deal.

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The Sejm or lower house of parliament, voted 226-124 with 28 abstentions to approve Suchocka's 22-member Cabinet. It is backed by a seven party coalition of parties descended from the Solidarity labour union.

Approval by the upper house, the Senate, is expected within days.

Chen Fugong released

HONG KONG, July 13: The founder of a Chinese political party and a leader of China's 1989 pro-democracy movement has been released after completing his jail sentence in Canton, an American human rights activist said Monday, reports AP.

Chen Fugong, formerly a teacher at Zhongshan University, completed a prison sentence of three years on July 1, said John Kamm, a former businessman.

Kamm said that Chen was the last of the leaders of the Guangzhou Independent Student Federation to be released from jail, but that could not be independently confirmed.

As a teacher at the renowned Zhongshan University, Chen acted as an advisor to the student federation.

Hitler wanted war in 1938, say Goebbels diaries

LONDON, July 13: Adolf Hitler was preparing to go to war in 1938, according to the personal diaries of his propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, published by the Sunday Times, reports AFP.

According to the journals, discovered recently in Moscow, Hitler was playing "a cynical, cold-blooded poker game with Britain while busily issuing instructions for the attack on Poland to go ahead regardless."

While then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was returning from Munich with assurances of peace, wrote Goebbels, "the slogan from now on is: rearm, rearm, rearm."

The excerpts, said the Sunday Times, point to "Hitler's involvement at every stage of organization of the 1938 Kristallnacht programme against the Jews."

Publication of the journals has provoked controversy because the paper commissioned to transcribe them the British historian David Irving, whose contention that the Nazi death camps were fictitious has been criticized as anti-semitic.

Two days later, when England declared war on Germany, Goebbels recorded that Hitler "thinks there will be only a phoney war in the west. But now that I know (Winston) Churchill is in the Cabinet, I cannot believe that."

"But we will fight to victory one way or the other. This may well be the great decisive hour for Europe."

Sunday Times editor Andrew Neil said the newspaper will do all the selecting, editing and interpretation of material to be serialized.

Irving has told The Associated Press he learned of the diaries in May and went to Moscow, where he was allowed to spend three weeks reading and photographing them. He then contacted Neil, signing a "lucrative contract" with the newspaper.

Viktor Bondarev, head of the special archives at the Russian Archives Committee, told The Associated Press he only learned of Irving's political views a few days before he finished and Irving now was barred from the archives.

The London tabloid Daily Mail on Friday began serializing excerpts from the diaries, it said it had obtained them from the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich, which was concerned over reports of Irving's involvement in The Sunday Times deal.

Suchocka's cabinet approved

WARSAW, July 13: One house of Parliament on Saturday approved the Cabinet of Prime Minister Hanna Suchocka, ending a five-week long political impasse which has left Poland virtually without a government, reports AP.

The Sejm or lower house of parliament, voted 226-124 with 28 abstentions to approve Suchocka's 22-member Cabinet. It is backed by a seven party coalition of parties descended from the Solidarity labour union.

Approval by the upper house, the Senate, is expected within days.

Off the Record

Rabin incapable of making peace

AMMAN: Palestinian Spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi said here today that the upcoming labour-led new Israeli government would not bring peace to the Middle East, reports Xinhua.

In a statement issued before leaving for the occupied territories, Ashrawi said latest events have shown that the new Israeli government under Labour Party Leader Yitzhak Rabin is "incapable of making peace."

The Spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation to the Arab-Israeli peace talks said that Rabin has not taken any step to solve the Palestinian problem since the Labour won in Israel's general elections on June 23.

Ashrawi arrived here Saturday after visiting Germany and the United States.

They were locked for two decades

BANGKOK: A brother and sister became so fed up with the world that they locked themselves in their rooms for 20 years, Thailand's largest-circulation newspaper reported today, reports Reuter.

The newspaper Thai Rath published a photograph of Chuiyang Saatang, now 60, with a black beard and hair reaching down to his waist.

Next to him is a photograph taken before, showing him clean shaven and with short hair.

Chuiyang said he was a drifter in his younger days in his home village in Nakorn Sawan province, 250km (160 miles) north of Bangkok.

One day he suddenly decided he wanted to disassociate himself from other people so he locked himself in his room.

His sister Hear, 42, followed his example, Thai Rath quoted their 80-year-old mother Jaeng as saying.

She said her daughter emerged from the room at night to do housework, but had not spoken for two decades.

Sail Boston's final salute to Columbus

BOSTON: Hundred of thousands of people lined this port's waterfront on Saturday to watch some 200 stately tall ships from 35 nations parade up Boston harbour in a celebration of the 400th anniversary of Columbus' landing in the new world, reports Reuter.

"It's been marvellous the winds have been so favourable," said Sail Boston '92 spokeswoman Amy Guelden. Organisers estimated that over on million spectators watched the procession.

Sail Boston was the final US maritime salute to the Christopher Columbus quinquennial. Last week, the tall ships sailed into New York harbour.

Spectators in some 4,000 craft ranging from a tiny one-man punt to two retired lightships, watched the six-hour parade of 25 square-rigged ships, brigs, schooners and a bevy of smaller vessels.

Diana still popular

LONDON: Britain's Princess Diana is the most popular member of Britain's royal family despite reports of a troubled marriage to Prince Charles, according to an opinion poll published on Monday, reports Reuter.

More people blame heir-to-the-throne Charles for the problems besetting their 11-year marriage, the survey in the Daily Express newspaper showed.

Some 35 per cent of those quizzed blamed the Prince of Wales for the alleged marital strains while only 16 per cent blamed his glamorous wife.

Sixty-eight per cent think Charles will be king one day, while 49 per cent believe Diana will never be queen.

The poll showed that 34 per cent felt Diana was their favourite royal, well ahead of her sister-in-law princess Anne, a recent divorcee, with 12 per cent and Queen Elizabeth with 11 per cent.