

New Afghan cabinet by this month

KABUL, July 24: Afghanistan is to have a new cabinet this month, the second since the Mujahideen took over power in Kabul some three months ago, officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

It will replace the present 34 members who were appointed by former caretaker President Sibghatullah Mojaddedi in May, they said.

The top governing leadership council headed by President Burhanuddin Rabbani Thursday invited all nine Mujahideen parties to propose names for the new lineup.

According to a decision of the leadership of council, each Mujahideen party will propose six to nine names for the new cabinet.

EC envoy refuses to talk more truce

SARAJEVO, July 24: Warring ethnic factions fought fierce battles in Sarajevo today with artillery, mortars and machineguns, cutting a trail of destruction through the Bosnian capital, reports Reuter.

In the worst fighting in several days, intense battles between Muslims, Croats and Serbs could be heard in districts around the city, where 380,000 civilians are trapped.

The heaviest fighting, with the sky lit up by tracers and exploding shells, was between 4 and 5 am. Then after tapering off, the battles were resumed later in the morning.

A London report adds:

European Community peace envoy Lord Carrington has said he will negotiate no more cease-fires in Bosnia until the warring sides reach stalemate or exhaustion.

In an interview in Today Daily Telegraph, Carrington said he would waste no more words with leaders of Bosnia's three warring factions who promised one thing and did the opposite.

Carrington was speaking after the collapse of the latest cease-fire arranged in London last Friday between leaders of Bosnia's Serb, Croat and Muslim factions.

"I do not think there is much object in brokering an-

other cease-fire unless there is a radical change in circumstances," said the former British Foreign Secretary, and NATO Secretary General.

"You would be talking to the same people who ignored what was agreed last time," Carrington added.

Carrington has clashed with United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali over arrangements for the latest Bosnian peace initiative and his efforts on Tuesday to revive the cease-fire in Belgrade came to nothing.

Boutros-Ghali complained he was not consulted before being asked to arrange for UN

troops to monitor the combatants in accordance with the truce.

However Carrington said he was not about to abandon the peacemaking role he has carried out for nearly a year without success.

Instead, The Telegraph said, he was changing tack to put the onus on Bosnian leaders to show good faith. He has told them that it is they who must decide if they wish to attend the next round of peace talks due to start in London on Monday.

Carrington's office said a letter had been sent on Thursday to Bosnian President

Alija Izetbegovic, a Muslim, Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and Croat mate Boban.

"If they want to come, fine. If not, then we know where we stand," Carrington said.

Fighting between the three sides — Serbs opposed to independence from Yugoslavia pitted against pro-independence Muslims and Croats — has cost more than 7,500 lives in Bosnia.

The Telegraph said Carrington was also directing his energies to other parts of the former Yugoslavia where fighting was threatening to break out in at least six pockets of ethnic discord.

Off the Record

US govt too ignorant too arrogant, too coward

AMSTERDAM: Actress Elizabeth Taylor condemned US restrictions on AIDS sufferers and kissed a man with the killer disease who plans to challenge Washington's travel ban this weekend, reports Reuter.

"The sad and terrible truth is that the government of the United States is too ignorant, too arrogant and too cowardly to grant people with HIV full access to travel and immigration in America," she told the eight international conference on AIDS.

"Wake up and join the family of civilised nations. Lift all restrictions. Lift them today," she added.

Taylor joined a list of public figures backing the protest of Tomas Fabrega. The US resident with Spanish citizenship has said he would challenge immigration officers at San Francisco on Saturday to prevent him entering the country.

The United States is one of nearly 50 countries imposing immigration restrictions on people with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus).

"Travel restrictions are worse than pointless," Dr Michael Merson, head of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) global AIDS programme said in a statement.

"They can weaken AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) prevention campaigns and actually endanger the health of the public."



World's first sex swap

BEIJING: Chinese surgeons have performed what is believed to be the world's first direct sex swap, exchanging internal sexual organs between a man and a woman, a doctor on the operating team said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Xia Zhao Ji told reporters a 22-year-old woman received the testicles of a 30-year-old man, who received her ovaries during operations which took place last week.

Doctors constructed a false penis for the woman from her stomach lining, Xia said. They removed the man's penis and replaced it with a vagina made of leather.

"I believe this could be the first (such operation) in the world," Xia said.

His Beijing number three hospital pioneered China's first sex change operations in 1984.

Both patients are recovering well, but the ex-woman must take immunosuppressive drugs to overcome rejection of the new organs, the surgeon said.

Further operations will be necessary for the ex-woman to have a mal erection but Xia said he was confident the ex-man would be able to have a complete sex life.

Neither will be able to procreate, Xia said. Both are single and hope to find marriage partners.

This is art, not pornography

TOKYO: A popular art magazine will on Saturday expose readers to some 90 pages of nude photographs that defy Japan's ban on portraying public hair, one of its editors said today, reports Reuter.

"This is art, not pornography," said an editor at the influential monthly magazine, the Geijutsu Shincho.

"We're not concerned about what the police will think." The magazine, put out by the Shinchosha publishing house, is devoting 89 of its 176 pages to pictures of totally nude male and female models contributed by 30 photographers based in Japan and in other countries.

Last year, the magazine printed three photographs of similarly exposed models in its May edition, only to receive a warning from the Tokyo metropolitan police section in charge of pornographic material, nicknamed the Hair Squad.

"I think it's time to test this restriction on depicting public hair, particularly when it affects artistic expression," said the editor.

Public hair depiction is strictly banned in publications, films and other material for public use in Japan. However, scenes of sexual violence involving even children are readily available in the form of comic books and video films.

'Serious shortcomings'

WASHINGTON: Through an accident of timing, President Bush is addressing POW-MIA families Friday, a day after reports cited "serious shortcomings" in American efforts to locate missing servicemen in Southeast Asia, reports AP.

The reports were found among thousands of documents released Thursday by the US Defence Department after Bush government agencies this week to open all such files.

Friday's speech to the National League of Families of American MIAs-POWs in Southeast Asia had been scheduled before the order was issued.

The documents were the first installment of a planned release of more than 1.3 million pages of papers — some dating to 1973 — that will be made available over the coming months. They deal with the 2,266 Americans still unaccounted for in Southeast Asia.

One evaluation in the files said investigators had "a mind-set to debunk" information they received. Another 1986 report found "the strong possibility" of American prisoners still being alive in Laos and Vietnam, but nothing to show the US was covering up evidence about the missing Americans.

Castro to attend NAM summit

JAKARTA, July 24: Cuban President Fidel Castro will attend the Non-Aligned Movement's summit in Jakarta in September if there is no threat to his country from the United States, Cuban Ambassador to Indonesia Jorge Cubiles said today, reports Reuter.

"Really it (Castro's visit) does not depend on us. It will depend on the dangers in our region. This will only be known by the government of the United States," Cubiles told reporters, adding that the United States had been threatening Cuba for 32 years.

The summit of the 105-nation movement runs from September 1 to 6.

Castro did not attend the last summit in Belgrade. Analysts wondered whether he stayed away because of differences over the direction of the movement, set up in the early 1960s to help the developing world steer a middle path between the two superpowers.

But the Cuban Ambassador said that era had ended with the collapse of communist in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

"We cannot talk of natural allies when most of the socialist countries have disappeared."



MANILA: Former First Lady Imelda Marcos (L) talks to her lawyer Renato Dilag (R) before posting bail here allowing her to leave the country. — AFP/UNB photo

Mandela won't hold talks until demands fulfilled

LONDON, July 24: South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) Leader Nelson Mandela said in London Thursday that the ANC would not resume talks with the government until its demands were met, reports AFP.

Speaking at London Airport on his arrival after a Middle East tour, the nationalist leader said: "We have submitted a list of demands to the (South African) regime and we insist that they should meet those demands before there can be any discussion between the ANC and the regime."

Meanwhile, UN special envoy Cyrus Vance was meeting South African President Frederik de Klerk, under the terms of last week's UN resolution, which urged both sides to resume negotiations.

Lady Chalker reiterated the British government's view that both sides should resume talks as soon as possible, as this would help reduce tension and violence in South Africa.

Mandela defended the ANC's decision to hold a general strike next week, saying: "We have achieved a lot by mass action."

1.32 lakh refugees will get entry into US next year

WASHINGTON, July 24: President George Bush plans to let 132,000 of the world's 16 million refugees enter the United States next year, the bulk of them from East Asia and the former Soviet Union, Deputy US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Bush's funding plan falls 10,000 short of the number of refugees budgeted for this financial year, which ends in September, but makes up for the shortfall by allowing 10,000 privately funded refugees to enter the country.

"The United States has and will continue to play an active role, both financially and politically, in promoting refugees repatriation," Eagleburger told a UJMS Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs. "However a significant level of international cooperation and support must be forthcoming."

The United States makes repatriation its top priority but considers for admission anyone, on humanitarian grounds, who can establish persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, social group or politics.

Bush plans to admit 52,000 refugees from East Asia; 50,000 from the former Soviet Union, 7,000 from the near East and South Asia, another 7,000 from Africa, 1,500 Eastern Europeans and just 3,500 refugees from America's nearest neighbours, Latin America and the Caribbean from which thousands of Haitian boat people, seeking asylum after last September's coup, have sought

to enter the United States.

Another 1,000 refugee places would remain in reserve under the Bush plan.

The Bush administration has come under fierce criticism for welcoming refugees fleeing communist Cuba while it has repeatedly turned back rickety boats loaded with Haitians.

In May, Bush issued an executive order permitting the US coast guard to send Haitians home, a policy widely criticised by democratic lawmakers.

"America's historic com-

passion for the world's refugees must continue," Senator Edward Kennedy, a Democrat from Massachusetts and Chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee said.

"If we want other governments to respect the needs of all refugees ... we cannot protect refugees from Cuba but reject those from Haiti," he added.

Eagleburger told the Senate Committee: "As is evident, our programme will continue in the near term to address many of the residual human problems created by communism."

AIDS hospital to be built in Bombay

AMSTERDAM, July 24: Bombay Mayor Chandrakant Handore announced here that a modern hospital will soon come up in the city exclusively for the treatment of AIDS patients, reports PTL.

This will be the first AIDS hospital in the country.

He said his municipality has decided to donate land on which the hospital will be built with money from the World Bank loan.

Handore was one of the five mayors from cities in developing countries invited by the AIDS congress to discuss the AIDS situation in their cities and they are coping with it in a round table session moderated by actress Elizabeth Taylor.

Beijing holding over 10m in forced-labour camps

WASHINGTON, July 24: Beijing is holding more than 10 million Chinese — including at least 1 million political prisoners — in forced-labour camps that produce goods for domestic and foreign markets, says a Chinese-American who spent 19 years in the gulag, reports AP.

Harry Wu, a research fellow with the Stanford University-based Hoover Institution, said China continues to make big profits from prison-made products and has no intention of abiding by promises to the United States to curtail exports of such goods.

"We condemned Stalin's gulag. We condemned Hitler's concentration camps. How can we hold different standards for the 'laogai' (forced-labour

suppression of the Tiananmen democracy movement, although 'the numbers are small compared to the total over the past 40 year,'" Wu said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"We can't just talk about Tiananmen," he said, adding that the human rights issue in China must address what he estimated were the 50 million who have disappeared in labour camps since 1949 and the 10 million still imprisoned today. He cited Chinese figures in concluding that at least 10 per cent of those in camps today are being held for political reasons.

"The laogai is the foundation of China's totalitarianism," he said in his speech. "It is a political machine of violence

used to crush the individual spirit and advance class struggle."

Wu said he had collected data on about 1,000 laogai camps, and said all were required to pay their own way. In the 1950s and '60s, most were engaged in farming; now many have moved into manufacturing, with some 40 per cent of their products destined for export, he said.

"Never before has a nation created a prison system so extensive that it pervades all aspects of national production," he said.

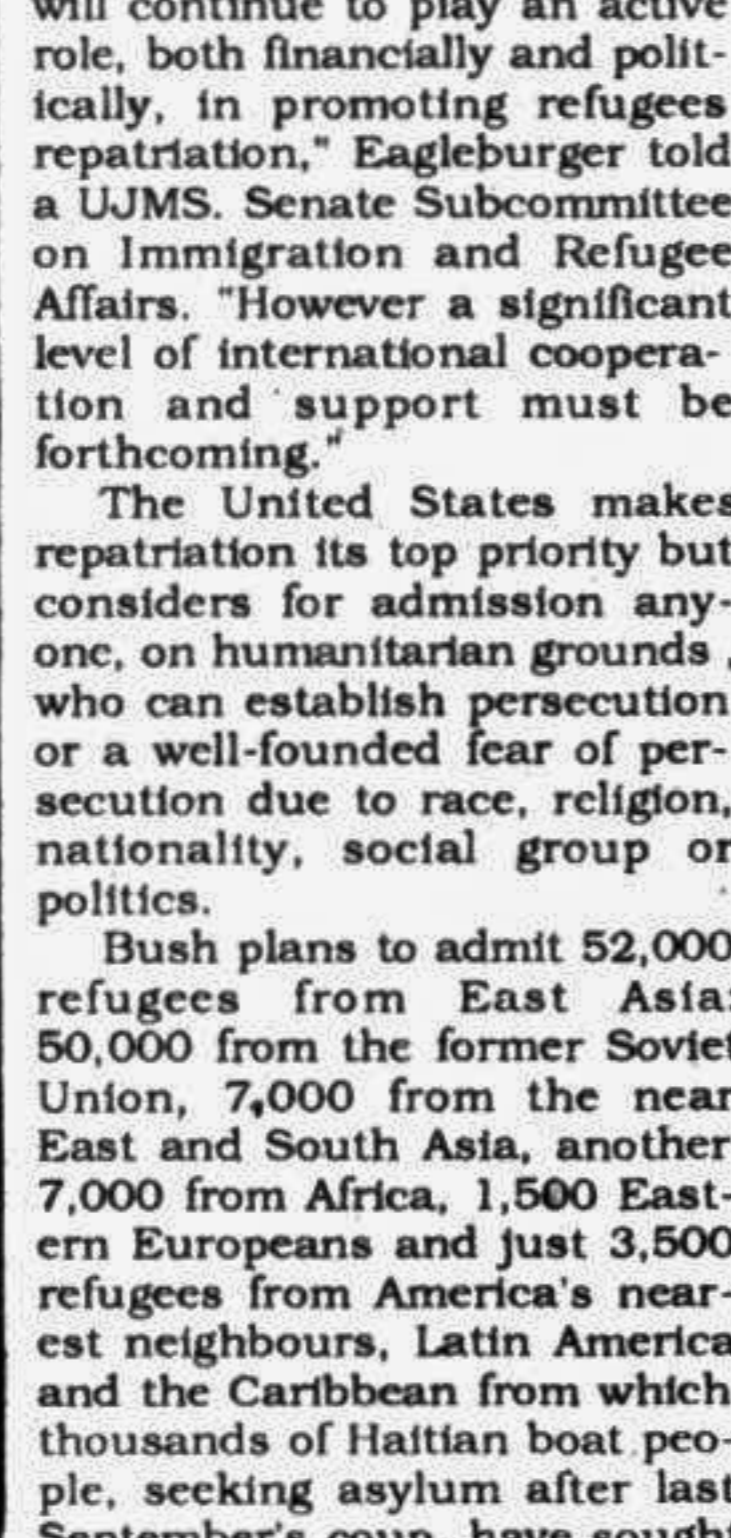
China has denied the United States that it exports prison-made goods, and last month indicated it would allow on-site inspections of some prison facilities.

Human rights groups and some members of Congress have focused on the prison-labour issue in pressing for a reversal of the Bush administration's policy of extending trade benefits to China.

Wu held little hope that China would give up export revenues from prison goods he estimated at 100 million dollar a year. He said China, the world's largest seller of tea, relies on prison labour for 33 per cent of its tea exports. Among other prison exports are farm products, textiles, steel pipes, valves and hides.

He said the camps use other countries to process prison-made products to help escape detection overseas.

"These modern-day slaves play a critical role in China's



LEBANON, Lebanese President Elias Hrawi (R) shakes hands with US Secretary of States James Baker during their press conference on July 23 in the village of Zahle in the Bekka Valley. — AFP/UNB Photo

We support political independence of Lebanon: Baker

BEIRUT, July 24: Secretary of State James Baker opened up two points of controversy in sectarian-divided Lebanon when he paid the first visit to the country by a top US official in nine years, reports Reuter.

Baker, whose country backed a 1989 peace pact which ended Lebanon's 15 years of civil war between Muslims and Christians, pressed both for a partial Syrian military withdrawal and for general elections.

He said the estimated 40,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon should soon redeploy under the terms of the Taif Peace Accord, which provided for political reforms followed two years later by a Syrian withdrawal to the Bekkaa Valley near Syria's border.

"We strongly support the political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon," Baker told a news conference on Thursday after three hours of talks with Lebanese leaders.

"I think it's an important time for the peace process to which Lebanon has committed itself."

His visit coincided with a one-day strike in Christian areas to protest against holding general elections, which would be the first in 20 years, before the Syrians pulled back to the Bekkaa.

Christian opponents argued that elections held under Syrian military control would attract only candidates loyal to Damascus, which already orchestrates Lebanon's political, foreign and military policies under a brotherhood treaty.

Baker said it was vital for elections to be free of any hint of "intimidation or coercion."

Syria says it wants to withdraw its forces as soon as possible and will not influence the polls.

Baker's visit, aimed at reviving Arab-Israeli peace talks, ended a nine-year US boycott of Lebanon where a wave of anti-western bombings, kidnappings and hijackings erupted in 1982.