

BRIEFLY

Gemayel dismisses elections: Former President of Lebanon Amin Gemayel said that Sunday's elections in his country had been "forced and fixed" and dismissed them as a Syrian operation. AFP says from Paris.

Gemayel said the "parody" of a general election in Lebanon had been held "at the request of Damascus and under the control of the Syrian armed forces".

The former President said that the authorities in Beirut were going to find themselves in a situation where they will either "face mass unrest" or "fall further under the control of Damascus".

"Syria too will lose this make-believe legal cover for its power in Lebanon," he added.

"This situation is all the more serious because Lebanon is engaged in the Middle East peace process, and the loss of legitimacy for the government, which is totally under Damascus's power, will obscure the higher interests of Lebanon," Gemayel concluded.

Confce on ageing from Aug 30:

The first global conference on ageing will be held in Bombay in the western state of Maharashtra from August 30, Xinhua reports from New Delhi.

The five-day conference will focus on the demographic changes in the world and the need to develop suitable policies for the welfare of the aged.

The conference will be organised by the International Federation on Ageing.

SPLA kills 14 in Sudan: The rebels of Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) Sunday claimed to have killed 14 government soldiers and wounded 300 others in a battle near the besieged southern city of Juba, reports AFP from Nairobi.

The rebels' radio, monitored in Nairobi did not indicate when the fighting occurred but said it started after government troops attacked three SPLA positions around Juba.

Juba is held by the government but has been under frequent attack from the SPLA, which has put it under virtual siege, and there was no independent confirmation of the report.

The SPLA, which has been fighting since 1983 to end domination of the mainly Christian and animist south by the Islamised north, has suffered a series of military setbacks this year, losing a string of towns of government troops.

Six drowned in Slovakia: At least six people drowned in a freak storm on lake Zemplinska Strava in eastern Slovakia late Saturday, the Czechoslovak agency CSTK reported Sunday, says AFP from Czechoslovakia.

Sudden gusts of wind and waves capsized pleasure boats, it said.

Three other people were also believed to have drowned.

Plane crashes with 4: An aircraft with four people aboard crashed into a hill on the remote Scottish island of Jura and police said on Sunday there were no survivors, reports Reuter from London.

The four-seater single-engined Socata TB20 Trinidad disappeared while on a flight from Blackpool in northern England to the island of Mull on the west coast of Scotland on Saturday.

The occupants have not been named. Department of Transport investigators were expected to travel to the scene of the crash on Monday.

Quake hits Japan: A medium-sized earthquake measuring 5.30 on the open-ended Richter scale hit the Okinawa region of southern Japan Monday, the meteorological agency said, reports Reuter from Tokyo.

The quake centre was in the sea off Ishigaki island in Okinawa prefecture. No injuries or tidal waves were reported.

12 killed in Bangkok road mishap: At least 12 people were killed and 15 injured when a bus and a truck crashed on the outskirts of Bangkok Monday a police officer said, reports AFP from Bangkok.

An official at a nearby hospital confirmed that 12 people were killed instantly in the crash. Injured people some of them in critical condition, were being brought into the hospital, she said.

The police officer said the cause of the accident, involving a Bangkok city bus in a northern suburb of the city, was still being investigated.

Gen Asif's invitation to India a trick?

ISLAMABAD, Aug 24: Pakistan President Ghulam Ishaq Khan welcomed Sunday a controversial invitation for the country's army chief to visit India, reports AFP.

Commenting on the Indian invitation to the Chief of army staff, General Asif Nawaz, the President said such exchanges could help "convey our stand" and understand the viewpoint of the other side.

The official daily, the Pakistan Times, said Sunday Kashmiri leaders considered the invitation to the army chief as a trick to divert attention from the Indian "atrocities" on the Kashmiris.

It said a meeting of Kashmiri leaders held here Saturday discussed ways to make the Pakistani part of Kashmir an "effective base camp" for the independence

struggle across the border.

It also reported that a former chief of military's intelligence, retired General Hamid Gul, attended the Kashmiri leaders gathering.

Several politicians, including their Premier of the Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan, have said that a visit by the army chief would harm the Muslim "freedom struggle" in the Indian-administered two thirds of Kashmir.

The Indian government extended the invitation during three days of talks in New Delhi last week between Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shaharyar Mohammad Khan and his Indian counterpart J N Dixit.

3 top Sikh militants killed

CHANDIGARH, Aug. 24: Three top militants were among nine ultras killed in separate encounters in Punjab, while two other persons were killed in the state since last night police said, reports PTI.

Khalistan Commando Force (Panjwar) Lt Gen Hardeep Singh, Area Commander Sakattar Singh and an unidentified militant were killed in an encounter near village Chanjoti Malan in Amritsar district.

An area commander of the Bhindranwale tiger force of Khalistan, Balwinder Singh was gunned down in an encounter near village Malmohari in Tarn Taran district.



SINGAPORE: An unidentified elderly woman survivor (C) from the sunken luxury liner Royal Pacific is consoled by her daughters after she arrived in Singapore on Sunday. Two people were killed and at least 10 missing after the 15,000 tonne Greek owned cruise ship collided Taiwanese fishing vessel in the Malacca strait. —AFP/UNB photo

500 survivors arrive in Singapore

SINGAPORE, Aug 24: More than 500 weary passengers and crew members saved from a sinking cruise ship returned to Singapore early Monday with tales of heroic rescue efforts and terror in dark seas filled with oil and debris, reports AP.

Search crews, meanwhile, scanned the Malacca Strait off Malaysia, where the 405-foot (123-meter) Royal Pacific went down Sunday about two hours after striking a fishing trawler. The Port of Singapore Authority said five people were missing, but other sources placed the figure higher. At least two people were killed. Most survivors were taken aboard the Bahamas-registered Mariza and the Cyprus-registered Chapevsk, a container ship, and returned to Singapore, where the Royal Pacific began its two-day round-trip cruise on just after midnight Saturday.

North Korea may postpone Inter-Korean talks

China, S Korea set up diplomatic ties

SEOUL, Aug 24: South Korea is not seeking to diplomatically isolate North Korea through Monday's announced establishment of full diplomatic ties between Seoul and Beijing, a top South official said today, reports AFP.

The move "should not be interpreted whatsoever that our intentions are to isolate North Korea," South Korean Foreign Minister Shin Kee-Bok told reporters.

"On the contrary, we encourage North Korea to take the stance of accommodation and adjustment to the reality of the world," he said.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that North Korea may postpone the Eighth Inter-Korean prime ministerial talks set to open September 15 in Pyongyang to protest Seoul's normalization of diplomatic ties with Beijing.

A Seoul official was quoted as saying North Korea appeared to be stalling in working level talks in a possible bid to delay the inter-Korean talks to protest the establishment of Sino-South Korean ties.

Officials contacted separately said they had no knowledge of the report. The foreign ministers of South Korea and China signed a joint communique today in Beijing establishing diplomatic relations after more than four decades of cold war rivalry.

China is North Korea's major remaining communist mentor following the demise of Soviet communism in 1991 and analysts believe the establishment of Seoul-Beijing ties will further isolate the Stalinist regime in Pyongyang.

Shin said that in the negotiations leading up to establishment of ties, Beijing had made

it clear that inter-Korean "mutual nuclear inspections should be implemented" on the Korean peninsula in addition to recent International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections of North Korea's nuclear facilities.

North Korea is suspected of seeking to develop nuclear weapons and Seoul, Washington and their allies have been pressing Pyongyang to implement inter-Korean nuclear verification inspections as agreed late last year.

Reuter adds: South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo said today's establishment of diplomatic relations with mainland China marked the beginning of the end of the cold war in Asia.

Roh, in a televised speech coinciding with the signing of the protocol in Beijing, said he would visit China soon to seal

the pact between the two former ideological foes.

"The normalisation of ties between our two countries marks a significant turning point in world history in that it heralds the beginning of the end of the cold war in east Asia, which remains as the last legacy of the cold war era," Roh said.

But a Seoul government official said North Korea was showing "a very stiff attitude" following the South's diplomatic breakthrough with Pyongyang's principal backer.

"It is true that North Korea is unhappy over the normalisation of relations between South Korea and China, but it will not be easy for the north to delay the high-level talks because it has to consider the burden stemming from postponement," the official was quoted as saying.

Afghan children dying of disease in refugee camps

SAROBI, Afghanistan, Aug 24: Afghan children are dying of disease in rudimentary refugee camps filled with thousands of people fleeing battles in their battered capital, where many have left behind family they may never see again, reports Reuter.

The Baghi Raics, a once elegant garden of fruit trees and roses designed by ex-kings of Afghanistan, has been transformed into a huddle of ragged, makeshift tents and shelters for about 2,500 former Kabul residents, many of them women and children.

Most of the two- to four-year-old children are suffering from sunstroke, diarrhoea and pneumonia, said the camp's self-appointed security commander, Gul Rahman, 32, a fighter from the dissident Hezb-i-Islami Mujahideen group.

So far seven children have lost their lives and there are no doctors and medicines to treat them, he said.

UN officials have warned of disease, particularly meningitis, breaking out among the tens of thousands of people leaving Kabul. The city has for two weeks been the battlefield for a bloody confrontation between the Hezb, under fundamentalist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and troops of the Mujahideen coalition government.

My daughter was two-year-old and for the last 15 days she had been suffering from diarrhoea but there was no medicine for her, said Sher Aga, 32. Finally she took her last breath and left us to

grieve.

"I have two daughters, one of them is suffering from pneumonia and the other has stomach problems, said Khan Mohammad, 39, a soldier under the former communist government. "But there is not a single tablet in the whole camp."

More than 1,800 people have been killed, mostly women and children, and several thousand injured in the Kabul fighting. More than 120,000 have fled into the

provinces or across the border into Pakistan, the United Nations said on Sunday.

The United Nations announced a 10 million dollar emergency package for urgent humanitarian needs, including 4 million dollar for transport of food aid and 2 million dollar for medical supplies and supplementary feeding.

An estimated 500 families had taken refuge in Baghi Raics in just 18 days, Gul Rahman said. More arrive daily.

Deng seeks students' support for reform

BEIJING, Aug 24: Senior leader Deng Xiaoping has called on China's students to support his reforms three years after he authorised the bloody Tiananmen Square crackdown on students-led pro-democracy protesters, reports AFP.

The 88-year-old patriarch told university and college students that China was at the critical stage in its socialist construction, the state news agency Xinhua said, paraphrasing a letter issued today.

"Whether it can speed up its reform and opening to the outside world is crucial to the country's development," he said, urging the students to study hard and "to harness their destinies to the country's".

The letter was unprecedented since Deng's official retirement in March 1990 and was written at his request by

the Chinese Communist Party central committee's general office.

Xinhua said the message was in reply to letters 16 students had written Deng supporting his speeches in southern China. The leader toured southern cities early this year to try to accelerate his policies of economic reform and opening to the outside world.

The letter writers included those from Beijing University, the news agency said.

Beijing University was the hotbed of the 1989 democracy movement and several of its students were arrested and imprisoned after the June 4 crackdown, including Major Wang Dan who is serving a four-year term.

China's students should "train themselves to become qualified personnel for the country's construction," Deng said.

Protest against asylum seekers in Germany on

ROSTOCK, Germany, Aug 24: Police and rightist protesters clashed for the third straight day Monday outside a home housing asylum-seeking refugees in this northern coastal city, reports AP.

Several protesters were injured, but the asylum-seekers were unharmed, police added.

The disturbances began Saturday, when about 200 rightist radicals attacked the home with firebombs and stones, and the clashes continued Sunday and into Monday morning.

Refugees and their shelters have been targets of violence for more than a year in Germany, where many residents resent newcomers and the government support they receive.

Police in Rostock said they restored order around 3 am (0100 GMT) Monday, after 800 police officers drove back about 500 protesters.

In a statement, authorities in the Baltic coast city said they arrested about 150 of the rightist protesters in the latest clash.

The home has about 200 asylum-seekers, mostly gypsies from Romania. Windows in the building were shattered and several police vehicles and other cars were set ablaze during the weekend violence, police said.

Before the building was attacked on Saturday, residents staged a protest against the asylum-seeker's presence there.

Police said the residents, shouted xenophobic slogans and encouraged the protesters when they began stoning the building.

Off the Record

He has started to think himself as an old man

HAVANA: Cuban leader Fidel Castro has acknowledged that at 66 he is starting to think of himself as an old man, but added that many old men have made extremely good politicians into their 80s, reports AFP.

The remarks came in a lengthy interview Castro gave to former Nicaraguan interior minister in the Sandinista government, Tomas Borge, in April, which was published here this week under Castro's signature and with the title "a grain of corn, a conversation with Tomas Borge."

"I think that for the first time in my life I am speaking of myself as an old man," said Castro, who turned 66 on August 13.

But he added that the question of age was "relative," saying that while some leaders had been forced to retire from the political scene at an early age, others "are carrying out their public functions efficiently at the age of 70, 75, or 80."

The death of Lenin at a relatively young age was a misfortune for the Soviet Union, Castro said. "He should have lived 10, 15 or 20 years longer."

Women preparing for battle

NEW YORK: In a packed sweltering meeting hall, the most potent women's group of the past 20 years is preparing for battle, reports AP.

"Anita Hill woke us up!" yells one woman from the back of the Women's Action Coalition meeting. "Let's back this up with a lot of noise!"

WAC was born after the hearings last year in which Hill accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment, and many members cite those hearings as their inspiration.

"Anita Hill really put almost everyone I know over the top," said artist Deborah Kass, 40, a founding member. "It was as if that moment last fall told the truth about what was happening. It galvanized a lot of women."

But group members say Hill is only a symbol of a serious erosion of women's rights. They worry about such things as acquittals in high-profile rape cases and the threat to abortion rights.

Like the Women's Army Corps of old, WAC is on a mission it regards as serious as war: fighting for women's rights. Since it was formed in January, WAC has grown from a loose assortment of 15 artists in downtown Manhattan to more than 2,000 women around the country.

'Joy of Sex' for disabled

ST. LOUIS: Erica Levy Klein and Ken Kroll are trying to knock down more private barriers facing physically disabled people with their book "Enabling Romance," a sort of "Joy of Sex" for the disabled, reports AP.

"I think if there's one major stereotype that people have about people with disabilities, it's that they can't have sex at all and they aren't interested in sex and they don't need sex," said Levy Klein.

Levy Klein, 35, said she saw the need for the such a book when she was dating Kroll, a paraplegic, who is now her husband. In bookstores, she found poignant accounts of people learning to live with their disabilities or overcoming stereotypes, but none sufficed as a "how-to" sex manual.

The reason is it's still a taboo subject," Levy Klein said. "It's still something people are uncomfortable about in a primal kind of way."

The book relies on first-person accounts from people with various physical disabilities, including spinal cord injuries, polio, multiple sclerosis, blindness and deafness.

To think Woody as my father laughable

NEW YORK: Soon-Yi Previn, the 21-year-old adopted daughter of actress Mia Farrow, denies she was manipulated into a romance with Woody Allen and says it is laughable to think of her mother's former boyfriend as her father, reports AP.

"I was not raped, molested or manipulated as Mia has hysterically charged, nor am I retarded or mentally slow as she would have you believe," Previn told Time magazine in an interview Friday.

"To think that Woody was in any way a father or stepfather to me is laughable," she said. "My parents are Andre Previn and Mia, but obviously they're not even my real parents."

Farrow's publicist, John Springer, said Sunday that Farrow had no immediate response to Ms. Previn's remarks.

Allen, too, has denied there was anything incestuous in his affair with the daughter of a woman with whom he was romantically involved for 12 years.

Tajik top judicial staff shot dead

MOSCOW, Aug 24: Tajikistan's top judicial official was shot dead in front of his wife in the former Soviet republic's capital Dushanbe early today, a government spokesman said, reports Reuter.

He said the attack, which could stir further violence in a country already threatened by turmoil, occurred as Procurator-General Nurullo Khuvaidullayev accompanied his wife to work in his government car. He had received many death threats.

After she left the car, the gunman ran up and ordered Khuvaidullayev and his driver to get out and stand on the street, the spokesman said. The procurator and his driver were then shot at point-blank range and killed outright. The men then ran off, he added. A search is underway for the killers.

He said no further details of the attack were available but he accused Tajikistan's opposition of being behind the action.

The opposition to conservative ex-communist leader Rakhmon Naviev is a divided force consisting of reform communists, anti-communists and Islamic activists. Naviev narrowly avoided being overthrown in May when demonstrations erupted into street fighting between government forces and opposition gunmen. The President held on to power by forming a frail ruling coalition incorporating elements of the opposition.

3 top Sikh militants killed

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Parenthood has become luxury in Russia

or more children are gone. Parenthood has become a luxury few can afford.

"If there isn't some kind of economic stability, I think the birth rate is going to keep on falling," said Vladimir Kolesnikov, director of the cooperative clinic where Dmitrieva had come for her pregnancy test.

"Everyone's saying productivity is falling, other rates are falling, but really the scariest figure is the decline in the birth rate," he said. "It's many times more frightening, because children are such a large part of the country's future."

In the last four years, so many women have postponed childbearing that births in Russia had fallen almost 30 per cent by 1991 to a postwar low of 1.8 million, or 12.1 per thousand.

So far in 1992, deaths have outnumbered births by 55,219, said Igor Korolyov, head of demographics for the Russian State Statistics Committee. Those facts reflect a sense of despair so pervasive that the government has intervened, increasing maternity leaves from 18 months to three years and offering a 2,700-ruble reward for new parents, plus a monthly allowance of 500 rubles for at least the first year.

Inflation erodes the benefits. In the last trimester of Margarita Bukarasova's pregnancy, her anticipated compensation for motherhood lost more than half its value.

The child, who will be named either Anastasia or Nina depending upon which parent prevails, will be the first and only for Bukarasova and her husband, a businessman. They planned and saved for this baby for eight years.

"We wanted to have material stability," said Bukarasova, 29, who expects her head cashier's job to be waiting after her three-year leave. "My husband and I make enough. We'll be able to do it ourselves."

"I think you must have at least one child anyway, no matter what's going on. Our kids will live better than we do."

See how optimistic our mothers are? said Dr Lyudmila Lepikhina, head of obstetrics at No 72. The plummeting birth rate means the hospital is delivering 40 per cent fewer babies than five years ago, an

average of about 3,000 a year, and performing an equal number of abortions.

Lepikhina suggested it was more a matter of fertility than finances.

The number of births hasn't always been constant, she said. It probably has to do with the number of women who are able to have children at that point in time.

There are 35 million women of childbearing age in Russia and 70 million in all the former Soviet Union. In fact, the birth rate is falling rapidly in more than half the 15 former republics, including Russia, Armenia, Moldova, Georgia, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine.

The reason, said Irina Manuilova director of the Soviet Family Health Association, is that few of those women are

realizing their reproductive potential. Maternal instincts are smothering under fear of the future.

"In Russia, the index of total fertility — the number of children a woman bears in her lifetime — is 1.6," she said. "But to have more people, the index must be 2.2."

Manuilova is a family-planning pioneer in a nation where ethnic minorities have associated the term with genocide, where birth control always meant abortion and other forms of contraception have been either substandard or unavailable.

She hopes educating Russians about birth control will help preserve fertility by preventing problems associated with repeated abortions.

"Every woman," she said, "has the human right to have as many children as she wants."

Cancerous cells removed from Hussein's body

ROCHESTER, Minn, Aug 24: A spokesman for Jordan's King Hussein said Sunday that cancerous cells were found in the tissue removed during surgery at the Mayo Clinic, reports AP. "I believed the doctors said 'Yes' (it was malignant), but in the very early stages," said Chief of Protocol Mohammad Adwan. "It was contained totally and it had not spread anywhere else."

Adwan said the news came from Hussein's personal physician, Samir Farraj, who also told him the monarch is "recovering very well" and is "expected to be out of the hospital in a few days." A statement from the royal palace Saturday quoted Farraj as saying that the surgery found "abnormal cells"