

Kashmiri rebels kill two hostages

SRINAGAR, India Sept: Two Indian military engineers held hostage by Kashmiri Muslim rebels for six weeks were killed on Thursday when they tried to escape a rebel spokesman said, reports Reuters.

The spokesman for the Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) said the men were shot when they tried to flee while being shifted from one rebel hideout in Srinagar to another.

The engineers attached to the Indian army were abducted on August 4 while travelling to Srinagar from a neighbouring town.

The JKLF, one of many groups fighting for secession of Muslim-majority Kashmir from India, had tried to negotiate their release in exchange for several jailed rebels.

The JKLF spokesman, who contacted reporters by telephone, said the government showed no interest in a swap.

State police chief B.S. Bedi said two bullet-ridden bodies were found in Srinagar later on

Thursday but they had not been positively identified. Nearly 8,000 people have been killed in Indian-ruled Kashmir since the secessionist movement erupted in 1990. India controls two-thirds of the Himalayan region and Pakistan the rest.

No talk on Golan Heights until Syria defines peace: Rabin

JERUSALEM, Sept 18: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in his first response to an impasse in Syrian-Israeli peace talks, on Thursday said there could be no talk of returning the occupied Golan Heights until Syria said what it meant by peace, reports Reuters.

"We came to the peace negotiations wanting to know first of all what kind of peace we are discussing with them. So long as they are not ready to clarify this definition, there is nothing to discuss on territorial matters," Rabin told reporters.

1500 Indian Tamils held on charge of sedition

MADRAS, Sept 18: Police in southern India today arrested about 1,500 Tamils who had called for the right to self-determination in India and supported a banned Sri Lankan rebel group, officials said, reports Reuters.

At least 1,500 people were arrested in the southern state of Tamil Nadu on charges of sedition, said state police official Walter I. Dawaram. Sedition carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment under Indian law.

He said the arrests were carried out peacefully but that police were on alert to prevent any violent reaction.

Those arrested included the organisers of a three-day conference in Madras last week. This called for the right to self-determination for Indian Tamils and gave support to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a rebel group fighting for a Tamil state in neighbouring Sri Lanka.

More than 340 people were arrested in one district alone, said police official K.K. Rajasekharan Nair.

The LTTE was outlawed in India earlier this year after it was accused of being behind the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. He was blown up by a woman suicide bomber while on the campaign trail in Tamil Nadu in May 1991.

India's Tamils live mostly in Tamil Nadu, separated from Sri Lanka by a narrow strip of sea. The LTTE had used the state as a sanctuary from its nine-year war for an independent homeland in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

India originally supported the LTTE but became embroiled in a war with it after trying to disarm the rebels under a 1987 peace accord with Colombo.

Last week's conference, organised by more than 20 Tamil political parties, adopted a

resolution saying that "the right of self-determination has to be constitutionally provided."

Several people at the meeting carried posters of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and shouted slogans in his support.

The police move came after severe pressure on the Tamil Nadu government to take action against those attending the conference.

Era Anabarasu, a parliamentarian from the ruling Congress Party, had urged the arrests of the conference leaders and of former Prime Minister V.P. Singh, who was invited to attend the meeting. It was not immediately known if Singh attended.

Calling for secession is a crime under Indian law.

Tamil Nadu is ruled by a Tamil Party allied to the Congress Party but their relationship has been uneasy for some months.

Indefinite curfew in northern Lanka

COLOMBO, Sept 18: Security forces today clamped an indefinite curfew in large parts of northern Sri Lanka which are under the control of separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas, officials here said, reports AFP.

The curfew went into effect at dawn Friday across the Jaffna peninsula which is virtually dominated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a military spokesman here said.

He did not say why the curfew was imposed but on previous occasions curfews have preceded limited military operations against the guerrillas who are fighting to establish an independent homeland in the island's northeast.

There have been no major military operations against the LTTE in the past three weeks since the August 21 capture of a key guerrilla beach landing point in the Jaffna peninsula.

Because of the LTTE control curfews are almost impossible to enforce except from the air. Any movement spotted is considered a legitimate target.

Off the Record

"It was an innocent kiss"

ABU DHABI: A United Arab Emirates (UAE) court has sentenced a woman to two months in jail after she was kissed by a male friend in public although she pleaded not guilty, saying it was an "innocent" kiss, reports AFP.

The kiss was innocent. I don't have an illicit relationship with the man," Gulf news daily quoted her Thursday as telling the court in Fujairah, one of the seven Emirates in the UAE — a Muslim conservative society that bans kissing in public.

The woman, a foreigner identified only as KV was walking in the street with her friend when he kissed her. Two local men, angered by the act, tried to take them to police but the man escaped, the paper said.

A lower court had sentenced the woman to six months in prison and ordered her expulsion from the country. The verdict was reduced by the appeal court.

Father forced daughter to be a prostitute

KUALA LUMPUR: A man, incensed that his teenaged daughter refused to become a prostitute, cut off her hand, a Malaysian minister said, reports Reuters.

The minister gave no details of the case but said that in another incident, a couple tried to force their three daughters into prostitution.

However, authorities decided to send the parents for counselling and not charge them in court, newspapers quoted National Unity and Social Development Minister Napsiah Omar as saying on Thursday.

"It will be inhumane for us to prosecute them as they have other children to look after," she told a seminar in the northern city of Ipoh.

The girls have been sent to welfare homes after Malaysian authorities found out about their plight. Malaysian officials have expressed concern about a growing number of child abuse cases.

He wins battle with huge python

MARTIZBURG: A farmworker battled an 11-foot python for a half-hour after it dropped on him from a tree, finally squeezing, biting, and beating the reptile to death, his employer said, reports AP.

Edward Mkhize had gone to fetch cattle Wednesday when the snake fell from above and wrapped itself around him. Mkhize's employer, Suresh Maharaj, told local newspapers.

Man and snake fell to the ground in a tangle. Mkhize sank his teeth into the writhing serpent's throat, then twisted the thick body. The snake's strength finally gave out, and Mkhize smashed its broad head with a rock.

Maharaj said pythons had killed several calves and at least three people in the area of eastern Natal province. The snakes are not poisonous but crush prey to death.

She was victimised by 'harasser' and 'system'

WASHINGTON: The Department of Veterans Affairs has been slow to move in some cases of sexual harassment, a group of female employees say. And the VA's inspector general finds some basis for their concerns, reports AP.

The women testified before a House panel Thursday that they were sexually harassed at work, sometimes physically, and later faced reprisals for complaining about it.

"You are victimised first by your harasser and next by the system," said Mary O'Connor, who said she was a victim of physical sexual harassment by a doctor at the VA Medical Center at Northampton, Mass.

She said that when she complained, "management attempted to minimize the abuse, to cover up the actual assault and to inform me that, should I file a formal complaint, the entire hospital would be aware of the offense — and that complainants are in for extreme discomfort."

A survey of randomly selected employees found one in four would be reluctant to file a complaint for fear of reprisal.

Other women who testified said they had received unwanted job transfers, reduced responsibilities, punitive scheduling and were subjected to embarrassment before their colleagues after complaining of sex harassment.

BRIEFLY

4 Kurds gunned down in Berlin: Gunmen burst into a Berlin restaurant and killed four members of the Kurdish Democratic Party and seriously wounded a fifth shortly before midnight, police said Friday, reports AP from Berlin.

Two gunmen armed with machine guns entered a backroom of the Mykonos restaurant at about 11 pm in the district of Wilmersdorf, and opened fire, said Berlin police spokesman Gerhard Lippke.

Lippke said his office had no information about from which land the officials came from: Iran, Turkey or Iraq, where the Kurdish Democratic Party is seeking independence or greater autonomy.

Chernobyl reactor shell cracked: The concrete shell encasing the Chernobyl reactor which exploded and caught fire in 1986, is cracked and splitting open according to a Russian scientist, the news agency ITAR-Tass reported Thursday, say AFP from Moscow.

The cracks, which cover a thousand square feet of the shell, sometimes let in rainwater, Sparktak Belyayev, a member of the Russian Academy of Science, told a meeting on "Nuclear technologies of tomorrow" at an international conference of scientists in Saint Petersburg.

UN office in Armenia soon: An agreement was signed at UN headquarters on Thursday for the opening of a UN office in Yerevan, the Armenian capital, reports Reuters from United Nations.

The office, combining information and UN development programme functions, is one of six being established in republics of the former Soviet Union.

One was opened in Minsk, the Belarus capital, on September 8 and others are planned for Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

The office in Yerevan is expected to open by October 24, observed annually as United Nations Day.

Yeltsin to visit Seoul Nov 18: Russia President Boris Yeltsin will make the first visit to South Korea by a Russian head of state on November 18-20, an official said Friday, reports AP from Seoul.

Presidential spokesman Kim Hak-joon said the date of Yeltsin's visit was set through diplomatic consultations.

Yeltsin originally had been scheduled to visit South Korea and Japan this week but the trip was cancelled at the last minute.

Kim said Yeltsin called President Roh Tae-woo last Wednesday to visiting South Korea this year.

In 1990, South Korea established diplomatic relations with the former Soviet Union, a longtime ally of Seoul's rival, Communist North Korea.

UN team to visit Tajikistan: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has accepted an invitation from the government of Tajikistan for a UN team in Uzbekistan to visit the neighbouring country, his spokesman said Thursday, reports AFP from United Nations.

Francois Giliant said the mission, currently in Uzbekistan to study the risks of destabilisation in Central Asia, would go on to Tajikistan, where Muslim and pro-communist forces reportedly broke a new ceasefire overnight.

Official Tajik sources said the mission would meet in Dushanbe with representatives of the various political factions.

Bush names envoys to 3 new States: President George Bush named ambassadors Thursday to Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia, newly independent states following the breakup of the former Federal Yugoslavia, reports AFP from Washington.

A White House statement said the new envoys, who must be confirmed by the Senate, would help "foster a viable political, economic and trading partnership between the United States and these countries, including the development of democratic and market-oriented reforms."

They would also encourage talks to end the fighting in the former Yugoslavia and promote delivery of aid shipments, it said.

Mara Leticia, an attorney and founder of the Croatian American Association, was named ambassador to Croatia. E. Allan Wendt and Victor Jackovich were named ambassadors to Slovenia and Bosnia, respectively. Both are career foreign service officers.

Four Guatemalan rebels killed: Four Guatemalan rebels were killed Thursday in a clash with soldiers in the north of the country near the border with Mexico, the army press office said, reports AP from Guatemala city.

Soldiers were patrolling in Quiche province when they encountered the guerrillas in Amachel, about 90 miles (145 kms) northeast of the capital, the army statement said.

The four were killed in the clash, which took place a few miles (kilometers) from the Mexican border, the statement said.

An unspecified number of rebel fighters escaped, leaving traces of blood and abandoning munitions, radio equipment, antigovernment leaflets and a bag of food, the army said. There were no army casualties, the statement said.

Chinese official in Hanoi for talks: A senior Chinese official arrived in Hanoi on Friday for talks with the Vietnamese government on territorial disputes that have strained bilateral relations recently, Reuters reports from Hanoi.

China's Deputy Foreign Minister Xu Dunxin, who arrived by road as head of a six-member delegation, told reporters he would do his best to ensure good bilateral relations.

Asked if ties had been tense in recent months, he said: "I'm sure that it's in the common interest to promote our relationship. I am sure I will try to make my best efforts in order to promote our relationship."



Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen visits the mosques compound, in Jerusalem's old city on Thursday. Qian is in Israel on a three day official visit, the first ever by a Chinese Foreign Minister. The Dome of the Rock is seen in the background. — AFP/UNB photo

Move to ensure fair polls

Roh to quit ruling party, form neutral cabinet

SEOUL, Sept 18: President Roh Tae-woo will leave the ruling party and organize a neutral Cabinet to ensure fairness in the upcoming presidential elections, the chief presidential spokesman said on Friday, reports AP.

The decision is an effort to calm rising public criticism against the governing party over a vote-rigging scandal that involves a provincial governor charged with buying ballots in the March parliamentary elections.

The spokesman Kim Hak-jun said the decision was made at a meeting Friday between Roh and Kim Young-sam, the

ruling Democratic Liberal Party's candidate for the presidential elections expected in December.

Roh, who by law is not eligible to seek another term, is the first president to leave his party.

The neutral Cabinet will be formed after consulting the opposition parties, the announcement said. The reshuffle will take place this month's end after Roh returns from a visit to China, it said.

Roh, whose single five-year term ends next February, currently serves as honorary president of the ruling party, which was formed in 1990 in a three-party merger with two

moderate opposition groups. "Roh is determined to put an end to controversy over government intervention in elections," the spokesman said.

He quoted Roh as saying, "Drastic measures are needed to get rid of old-fashioned illegal electioneering and to ensure fairness in the next presidential elections."

A former country chief and a ruling party candidate were arrested for allegedly buying votes in parliamentary elections in March. A provincial government was charged this week for complicity in the vote buying.

ANC demands removal of Ciskei ruler

KING WILLIAM'S TOWN, South Africa, Sept 18: African National Congress leaders called at a funeral vigil Friday for the removal of the military ruler whose troops gunned down 28 protesters, reports AP.

Chris Hani, a senior ANC leader, said people were no longer prepared to endure the rule of Brig Gen Oupa Gqozo in the Ciskei black homeland.

"There's a mood of militancy here," said Hani, who is also general secretary of the South African Communist Party.

Thousands of people gathered Friday for the burial of 15 of the protesters killed when Ciskei troops opened fire Sept. 7 on an ANC march calling for Gqozo's removal.

The killings plunged South Africa deeper into political crisis. The ANC and other black opposition groups claim President F.W. de Klerk's government was responsible for the deaths because the white government created the

homeland system.

People streamed to the funeral in buses, taxis, pickup trucks and on foot in sweltering summer heat. The ceremony was being held in a stadium in King William's Town, just across the border from Ciskei.

Armored police vehicles and policemen and soldiers, some carrying automatic rifles and others in riot gear, patrolled outside the stadium. Calm was reported in the nearby Ciskei capital of Bisho.

De Klerk told a meeting Friday of his ruling National Party in Johannesburg that progress was being made on getting the ANC to return to talks on a new constitution. He said negotiations were the only solution.

"All the reasonable aspirations of all South Africans can be realized through negotiations," he said.

ANC leaders in King William's Town took a more militant line. ANC Youth League President Peter

Mokaba told mourners during an all night funeral vigil, "The time for us now is to fight and fight and fight."

Placards accused De Klerk and Gqozo of the massacre. "The Butchers of Bisho they must go," read one, with pictures of De Klerk and Gqozo underneath.

But ANC President Nelson Mandela has said he will hold a summit with De Klerk on ways to resume negotiations if the government meets some conditions. Mandela and De Klerk have been trying to calm the political situation since the Ciskei killings.

A summit would be the first formal talks between the two sides since the ANC broke off negotiations in June, although informal discussions have occurred.

The government set up 10 tribal homelands in the 1960s and 1970s as separate states for blacks under apartheid. Only the government and homeland leaders recognize the system.

6 Palestinians hurt as Israelis open fire

JERUSALEM, Sept 17: Israeli troops shot and wounded six Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip today when they opened fire to disperse demonstrators marking the 10th anniversary of a massacre of Palestinians in Lebanon, an army source said, reports AFP.

Strikes gripped the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the second consecutive day to mark the anniversary of the slaughter in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, which took place during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

An Israeli investigation found that Lebanese Christian militiamen slaughtered 800 people as Israeli troops ringed the camps on the outskirts of Beirut. But the Palestine Liberation Organisation has put the number of dead at 1,500.

Lockerbie bombing Libyan defector aiding US

PARIS, Sept 18: US investigators have received inside information about the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 from a Libyan intelligence agent who defected after the explosion, according to L'Express news magazine, reports AP.

L'Express, in its current issue, identifies the defector as Majid Giaka the No. 2 official in the Libyan Arab Airlines office in Malta at the time of the 1988 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland.

It said he worked Al-amin Khalifa Fhimah, one of the two Libyan intelligence officers indicted in the bombing by a US federal grand jury. The two also have been charged in Scotland with murder and conspiracy in the attack, which killed 259 people.

Libya has denied involvement and refused international demands to surrender the two agents.

L'Express said Giaka saw the two agents stocking explosives at the airline office in Malta and preparing to send a bomb-rigged suitcase on an Air Malta flight to Frankfurt.



US rock star Michael Jackson performs his second show in France on Wednesday in Toulouse as part of his world tour. — AFP/UNB photo

Half of US high school students addict to alcohol

ATLANTA: Half of US high school students drink alcohol, one-quarter smoke and one-tenth use marijuana, federal health officials reported Thursday, says AFP.

In nationwide surveys of high school students last year, the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found an average 46 per cent said they had drunk alcohol at least once in the previous 30 days.

Twenty-four per cent said they had smoked cigarettes at least once in the previous 30 days and 11 per cent said they had smoked marijuana during the same period.

She paid \$8,000 for Madonna's bed

AMSTERDAM: A Dutch girl has paid \$8,000 dollar for the bed on which American pop singer Madonna romped in a recent film, the Dutch news agency ANP said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

In a sale of pop music memorabilia at a charity auction, 15-year-old Michou Daniels made the winning bid for the bed on which Madonna sang the song "like a virgin" in her film "In bed with Madonna".