

Saudi precaution to avert bloodshed during Hajj

ABU DHABI, Apr 7: Saudi Arabia, seeking to avert a repetition of the bloodshed in Makkah six years ago, has warned Muslim pilgrims to steer clear of politics when they converge on the holy city in May, reports AFP.

The warning came in a letter outlining instructions on the annual Muslim pilgrimage, or Hajj, which will take place in the last week of May.

The letter has been distributed by Saudi embassies to Islamic ministries in more than 40 Muslim countries, according to embassy officials in the United Arab Emirates.

The letter asked Hajj organisers to issue plastic cards bearing the name, nationality and address of each pilgrim, to be tied to their hands.

"Pilgrims are requested not to bring any books, leaflets or

Pak move to clear name from list of terrorism: 14 Arabs held

NWFP bans foreigners' entry to Fata

ISLAMABAD, Apr 7: The provincial government of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) has banned the entry of foreigners to tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, reports Xinhua.

The ban was imposed following an outcry about the presence of fanatic Muslims on Pakistani territory by certain Arab leaders including Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak who traces violence in his country back to Afghan war veterans of Arab origin.

The NWFP notified Tuesday that no foreigners would be allowed to enter the federally administered tribal area (Fata) or any other restricted area in the province without obtaining permission from the Home

Department, according to an official press release.

It said foreigners holding valid immigration documents and visa also need permission to visit Fata and other restricted areas in NWFP.

The political agents and other law-enforcing agencies have been instructed to arrest any foreigner violating the rules and proceed against him or her under the law.

According to government statistics, about 2,800 out of more than 6,170 Arabs who came to Pakistan between 1987-93 to take part in the Afghan Mujahideen's war have not returned to their countries.

These Arabs mostly belong to various Middle East countries.

On Tuesday, police in Peshawar, NWFP provincial capital, began a major operation against Arabs residing in the city and made a number of arrests, reports from Peshawar said today.

Nine suspected Libyan guerrillas, most of them heavily armed, have already been detained in Peshawar, police say.

The frontier province Home (interior) Department issued orders for the arrest of any foreigners found in the tribal areas, which do not come directly under Pakistani jurisdiction.

Political agents who supervise the border zones were ordered to arrest foreigners traveling in these tribal sanctuaries along Pakistan's porous border with Afghanistan.

Interior Minister Shujaat Hussain said last week the

Kim backs gradual reunification

PARIS, Apr 7: South Korea's new President Kim Young-Sam said in an interview published Tuesday that he backs a gradual reunification of the Korean peninsula, rather than a sudden joining together as happened in Germany, reports AFP.

"We do not want to follow the formula chosen by the Germans to absorb the North, and we don't want the North Korean regime to be dismantled suddenly as that would threaten the security of the whole peninsula," Kim said in an interview with the daily Le Monde.

"We want the reunification to take place gradually. Under such conditions, it will not be too costly," said Kim, who was told by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in a meeting last month of the cost of his country's reunification.

government would decide within a month whether to expel Arabs in Pakistan, extradite them or allow them to remain.

"We want these terrorist as much as the West does," Hussain said late on Tuesday. "We are not involved in these things."

Most of the Arabs came to Pakistan to fight in the 14-year Afghan Muslim war.

A senior Pakistani minister is visiting the United States this week for talks expected to cover the terrorism issue.

Nisar Ali Khan, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Minister for Petroleum, is the most senior Pakistani official to visit the United States since then-Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in June, 1989.

BRIEFLY

Bush goes to Kuwait Tuesday: Kuwait said on Tuesday that former US President George Bush will visit the emirate that he helped liberate from Iraqi occupation in 1991, reports Reuter from Kuwait.

Kuwaiti Minister for Cabinet Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Dakhil said Bush will arrive in Kuwait next Tuesday for a three-day visit.

"The Kuwaiti people are looking forward to show their personal feelings and appreciation to Bush," he said.

Bush enjoys wide popularity in Kuwait for leading efforts to end Iraq's seven-month occupation in 1991. Kuwait University will award Bush honorary degree.

US-Kuwait exercise from Apr 15: US and Kuwaiti forces will hold joint military exercises from April 15 to May 14, the Pentagon said Tuesday, AFP reports from Washington.

Some 1,500 US troops will take part in the exercises, named "Intrinsic Action 93-2," which will be held under a defence agreement signed after the 1991 Gulf War, a Pentagon spokesman said.

The last "Intrinsic Action" exercises were held in October and December.

Meanwhile Tuesday, Defence Minister Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem al-Sabah told reporters that Kuwait signed a 200-million-dollar accord with the United States to buy patriot anti-missile missiles.

Hotel fire kills 11 in China: Eleven people were killed and three others injured in a fire which engulfed a restaurant in southern China, a newspaper said in Hong Kong yesterday, reports AFP from Hong Kong.

The fire killed 11 people, seven men and four women, and injured three others early Tuesday in a restaurant in Huzhou, some 80 kilometres (50 miles) northeast of Hong Kong, the Ta Kung Pao daily said.

The victims were all employees at the restaurant.

The cause of the fire which took more than 30 minutes to put out was not known.

'Arabs want peace as soon as possible'

WASHINGTON, Apr 7: Visiting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said here yesterday all Arab parties "want to reach peace as quickly as possible," reports Xinhua.

He made the remarks at a joint news conference following his first talks with US President Bill Clinton at the White House.

"Peace will help every leader to raise the standard of living of the people in the area," he said. "The Syrian leader said it publicly and clearly I am very keen of peace... the Palestinians also are fed up from the present situation, being denied from everything."

"So I think it is very important, and I have great hopes that the negotiations will start on the 20th of April... and I hope we are going to work closely on that to get an end to problem by the end of this year if it is possible, Mubarak added.

Before his visit to the United States, Mubarak met with Syrian President Hafez Assad and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in Cairo, and said he would be willing also to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Calling his talks with Clinton "positive and productive," Mubarak said he and Clinton believed Egypt and the United States had a crucial role to play in order to allow



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (R) says goodbye to US President Bill Clinton (L) after the two embraced on Tuesday following their meeting at the White House.

the peace negotiations to reach a successful conclusion.

"Together we can make the ends meet and bridge existing gaps," he said. "Equally important is the task of removing the remaining obstacles, especially that of the deportees."

Clinton praised Rabin, at the new conference, for his moves to facilitate the peace talks, which have been interrupted by Israel's deportation of more than 400 Palestinians from the occupied territories to Lebanon last December.

"Whether it is enough to get people back to the table I hope it is, Clinton said.

Rabin has agreed to return 100 Palestinians immediately and other 300 at the end of the year.

But the Palestinians said that was not enough to bring them back to the negotiating table, and they are demanding immediate return of all deportees, in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution 799 before reopening the peace talks.

Off the Record

Malaysian time favourite for latecomers

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians, who are habitually late for anything from work to a date, have been slammed by the government for their tardiness, a local newspaper said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Stop using the excuse that you are following 'Malaysian time' when late for appointments, the New Straits daily reported Chief Secretary to the government, Ahmad Sarji Hamid as admonishing civil servants and private workers.

Malaysian time, a favourite tag for latecomers in this country, has also caught on with foreigners here while earning the scorn of the punctual few.

Sarji said Malaysia was heading for industrialised-state status by the year 2020, and warned that a general indifference to punctuality could hamper productivity and results.

"Each and everyone of us must give priority to time and not misuse it," he said in the sermon directed also at senior government servants.

It was unusual for me

SYDNEY: An Australian woman is suing the country's state-owned Qantas Airways, claiming her holiday in Thailand was ruined because she became sick after being forced to sit in a plane's smoking section, reports Reuter.

Leonie Cameron, 50, said yesterday she had been forced to spend most of her week-long holiday last July in a Bangkok hotel room with breathing trouble and sore, red eyes.

"I had a week sick up there and two weeks sick back here," Cameron told reporters after her solicitor lodged her suit in the Federal Court of Australia in Sydney.

"The doctor here told me I had bronchitis. I am a pretty healthy person normally, so it was unusual for me."

Cameron said that when she arrived at Qantas' check-in counter at Sydney's international airport she was told there were no seats left in the non-smoking section.

For the nine-hour flight to Bangkok, Cameron said she sat next to a man who smoked heavily. She said it left her with red, sore eyes, a running nose and breathing difficulties.

Cameron said she received a voucher for another trip to Bangkok from Qantas but only after she threatened legal action.

A Qantas spokesman said the airline was seeking legal advice before making a statement.

Nepali parliament body to review pact with India

KATHMANDU, Apr 7: Nepal has decided to set up a special committee of the two houses of Parliament to evaluate the Tanakpur accord signed with India in 1991 after an approval adopted by the lower house yesterday, reports Xinhua.

Basu Rimal, leader of the ruling Nepal Congress at the upper house, was elected Chairman of the 15-member special committee after long-time debating at the lower house session.

Of the 15 seats at the committee except for the chairmanship, 7 will be occupied by the ruling Nepali Congress and the other 7 seats will be divided among the opposition parties through consultation.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala was accused by opposition parties of violating the Constitution in allowing India to build part of the Tanakpur barrage on the Nepalese land.

The special committee will be functional till the next parliamentary session in late May or early July.

The committee is to evaluate the effects of Tanakpur project and decide whether the treaty is to be ratified by the joint session of parliament or by one of the house of parliament.

Meanwhile, AFP adds: Four factions of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) held a joint demonstration Tuesday to commemorate the deaths of Nepalese citizens killed three years ago in prodemocracy protests, witnesses said.

The demonstrators also used the occasion to criticise the government of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and call for the cancellation of an accord with India to build a hydroelectric dam partially on Nepalese soil.

Blast at Brussels' chemical plant: 100 injured

BRUSSELS, Apr 7: About a hundred people were taken to hospital suffering from breathing problems Tuesday, after an explosion and fire at a chemical plant in a Northern Brussels suburb, officials said, reports AP.

The blaze, which broke out near a Viaduct which carries the Brussels-Antwerp motorway, disrupted train services and road traffic for several hours, officials said.

Witnesses said flames and thick black smoke poured up around the Vilvorde Viaduct, which sweeps across a 100-metre (yard) industrial valley, and reached about a dozen houses.



The Princes of Wales is seen during a walkabout as she leaves Yorkshire Playhouse in England on Tuesday where she visited a Health of the Nation Conference.

Over 14000 Iraqi army deserters surrender

BAGHDAD, Apr 7: More than 14,000 Iraqi army deserters, hiding out in the country's southeastern marshes, have surrendered to authorities, the official daily Al-Jumhuriya said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The paper said the men "gave themselves up voluntarily to branches of the ruling Baath Party as well as to local party officials in the southern provinces to benefit from an amnesty by President Saddam Hussein."

The paper gave no details on the amnesty, saying only that 8,000 deserters had surrendered in Basra and more than 6,000 in Misran.

"Deserters continue to surrender in the neighbouring province of Zi Qar," the paper said, but gave no figures.

The ruling Revolutionary Command Council, the country's highest authority, in September issued an amnesty ruling for army deserters hiding out in the provinces of Basra, Misran and Zi Qar.

The provinces lie south of the 32nd parallel, where the United States, Britain and France have imposed a no-fly zone to protect the local Shiite population from Baghdad's forces.

Most of the deserters had fled during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War which ended in 1988 or during the Shiite and Kurdish revolts in the south and north, respectively, in March 1991, following the end of the Gulf War.

25 injured as Salvadoran plane runs off runway

GUATEMALA CITY, Apr 7: Only 25 people were injured when a Salvadoran Taca Airlines Boeing 767 jet carrying 224 passengers ran off a rain-slickened runway and ploughed into nearby houses, Guatemalan officials said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Nobody was killed in the accident on Monday night and just 21 passengers and four people on the ground were injured, the Guatemala City Fire Department said.

"One spark could have caused a huge catastrophe," said fireman Wilmer Quintanilla, who helped make safe thousands of gallons (litres) of jet fuel that ran through the streets of La Libertad, a poor neighbourhood at the end of the runway.

"It was the most frightening experience," one passenger told Guatemalan television afterwards.

Hunger strike to protest dismissal

SINGAPORE: An opposition politician on hunger strike for two days to protest his dismissal from the National University of Singapore (NUS) said Wednesday he has been drinking glucose water at his doctor's advice, reports AFP.

"I feel tired and groggy," said Chee Soon Juan 31, who taught Psychology at the university until he was sacked last week for allegedly misusing research funds.

"I have been drinking glucose water at my doctor's advice since Monday," he said, adding his weight had gone down from 165 pounds (75 kilos) to 159 pounds (72.2 kilos) since the protest began.

In responses to a question on whether his consumption of glucose still qualified his protest as a hunger strike, he said: "Why don't you go on glucose water and see how long it sustains you?"

Chee, who is also Assistant Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), said Monday he would stay of all food until university authorities retracted allegation that he was dishonest.

NUS officials said he had used 226 Singapore dollar (139 US) from research funds to send his wife's doctoral thesis to a US university for examination.

Kuwait signs \$ 200m pact with US as part of rearmament plan

KUWAIT CITY, Apr 7: Kuwait has signed a 200-million-dollar accord with the United States to buy Patriot anti-missile missiles, Defence Minister Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Sabah Al-Sabah told reporters Tuesday, says AFP.

Sheikh Ali, who did not specify the numbers involved or when the contract was signed, said the order was the final step in Kuwait's current rearmament programme, costing up to two billion dollars, since the end of the Gulf War in February 1991 when a US-led coalition ended seven months of Iraqi occupation of the Emirate.

Late last month, Kuwait and western sources said Kuwait had contracted to buy Patriot

missiles, the first of which are to be delivered in 1995, and that the contract had been signed at the "beginning of the year."

Kuwaiti military sources confirmed the deal, saying it was among several Kuwait has made to buy US weapons, including 256 M1-A2 Abrams tanks.

After the end of the Gulf War, the government announced plans to earmark 12 billion dollars over a ten-year period to bolster the country's defences. The plan is under review by the National Assembly.

But MPs said their approval of the programme hinged on the departure of certain civilian and military officials from the army.

Sheikh Ali said he rejected the condition but that "certain army officials will be retired in May, according to a set schedule."

He confirmed that the resignation of army chief of staff, General Jaber Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, had been submitted in February but that it had not yet been accepted.

The Defence Minister meanwhile said Kuwait was earmarking some two billion dollars to revamp military installations destroyed during the Iraq occupation in March 1992, the US Department of Defence submitted a request to Congress for the sale of weapons to Kuwait, particularly missiles and anti-missile material valued at 2.5 billion dollars.

A Pentagon source had said that Congress

would not oppose the sale, adding that the request involved six Patriot anti-missile systems, 480 Patriot missiles and six Hawk missile batteries.

Since the end of the Gulf War Washington twice deployed Patriots in the Emirate: during joint military maneuvers in July 1991 and last January during a confrontation between the allies and Iraq.

The missiles were also set up in Israel and Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War to shoot down Iraqi Scud missiles.

In December, Saudi Arabia bought 761 Patriots and 13 launchers worth over a billion dollars.

Palestinian shot dead in West Bank

JERUSALEM, Apr 7: Unarmed Palestinian was shot and killed yesterday by Israeli soldiers patrolling in the occupied West Bank after he ignored orders to halt for a check and ran away, the army said, reports Xinhua.

According to Palestinian reports, the victim was a shepherd tending his goats outside the town of Qabatiyeh.

Japanese nurses go on strike for higher wages

TOKYO, Apr 7: At least 50,000 Japanese nurses went on strike today to demand higher wages and better conditions, a medical labour union spokesman said, reports Reuter.

A spokesman of the Federation of Medical Workers' Unions, which has 176,000 members, said at least 50,000 nurses in hundreds of hospital began strikes of up to one day.