

BRIEFLY

Toxic gas claims 2 in Japan: Two workers died and six were badly injured yesterday after apparently inhaling toxic gas at a waste treatment plant in western Japan, police said, reports Reuter from Tokyo.

The men were using a mixer tank containing chemicals to treat industrial waste when the accident occurred at the factory in Fukushima, the police spokesman said.

One man fell into the tank and colleagues who tried to fish him out collapsed almost immediately, he said.

The workers were believed to have inhaled toxic gas in the mixer, but police were still investigating, the spokesman added.

China, Vietnam to sink differences: China's Defence Minister Chi Haotian had talks in Hanoi at the weekend with Vietnamese head of state Le Duc Anh and communist party chief Do Muoi, the official party newspaper Nhat Dan reported yesterday, says AFP from Hanoi.

It was the first visit to Vietnam by a Chinese Defence Minister since the two countries fought a border war in 1979. Chi and the Vietnamese leaders agreed that past and present differences should be settled through peaceful negotiation.

On Friday, Chi met Vietnam's Defence Minister Doan Khue and discussed border and territorial differences. They called for increased cooperation and exchanges between the armed forces of both countries.

7 found dead in California: Seven people were found shot to death early Sunday morning in a night club in Fresno, police said, reports Reuter from California.

"There are seven victims", a police spokesman said. He said the killings were discovered when police were called to the nightclub in the eastern outskirts of Fresno, 160 miles (260 KM) southeast of San Francisco, about 2-30 a.m. local time (0930 GMT).

A police investigation is continuing. No arrests have been made.

Khmer Rouge kill three: Khmer Rouge guerillas attempted to blow up a bridge on the main road linking northwest Cambodia with Thailand early yesterday, killing three and injuring 18 before they were driven off, a government army officer said, reports AFP from Poptet, Cambodia.

About 50 heavily armed Khmer Rouge attacked a Phnom Penh army post near the bridge on national route 5, six kilometers (four miles) west of the northwestern town of Stophon, shortly after midnight. The half-hour gunbattle left two government soldiers and a civilian dead, and 11 soldiers and seven civilians injured, the officer said. Khmer Rouge casualties were not known.

Quake shakes Japan: An earthquake of magnitude 3.6 on the Richter scale shook Japan's Iriomote Island near Taiwan at 5:39 pm (0839 GMT) Monday, but police said there were no reports of injuries and damage, AP reports from Tokyo.

The Central Meteorological Agency said the quake registered an intensity of five on the Japanese scale of seven on the island, about 250 kilometers (150 miles) east of Taiwan and 500 kilometers (300 miles) southwest of Okinawa.

An earthquake of five on the Japanese scale is strong enough to crack walls. The scale, which measures ground motion at particular points, is not convertible to the Richter scale.

The agency placed the epicenter of the quake under seas off Ishigaki Island near Iriomote.

Cambodian polls on schedule: Ghali

UNITED NATIONS, May 17: Elections in Cambodia should go ahead as scheduled despite threats to disrupt them from the Khmer Rouge, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said here, reports AFP.

"I... invite the Security Council to reaffirm that acceptable conditions exist for the conduct of free and fair elections in Cambodia" as scheduled on May 23 to 28, Boutros-Ghali said in a report to the Security Council dated Saturday.

"I further propose that the Council condemn any threat to the safety of voters, party workers and election officials from whatever source."

The Security Council is expected to draft a resolution on Cambodia on the basis of the report in the next few days. There were strong indications that the Khmer Rouge is likely to attempt to attack the polls and the voters with a combination of shelling, small-arms fire, grenades and the mining of roads in a bid to disrupt the elections, Boutros-Ghali said.

UN urges Angolan rebels to sign peace accord

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, May 17: The United Nations on Sunday urged Angolan rebels to sign a memorandum agreeing to finish peace talks with the government that have dragged on for five weeks without resulting in a ceasefire, reports AP.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sent a personal message to rebel leader Jonas Savimbi urging him to move ahead in the negotiations, said U.N. spokesman Joao Albuquerque.

The Angolan government delegation has already accepted the memorandum.

7 killed in Georgia

TBILISI, May 17: Seven persons were killed and 14 wounded, most of them civilians, when separatist Abkhazian forces used mortars to shell a funeral procession Sunday in the coastal region of Ochamchire, officials said here today, reports AFP.

The mourners were burying a Georgian National Guard soldier killed in recent fighting between Georgian and Abkhazian separatist forces, the official said.

Meanwhile, Abkhazia's main city Sukhumi was without electricity today after shelling damaged a pylon for high-tension electricity lines in the "chire region.

Pakistan no longer wants to be a villain in drug war

ISLAMABAD, May 17: Pakistan said Monday it is tired of being cast as a villain in the war against drugs and accused critics of targeting a scapegoat for a problem they helped create, reports AP.

"Pakistan is a victim of this illicit business," Narcotics Minister Sardar Aseef Ali told an international conference on drug abuse.

The United Nations, co-sponsor of the conference, estimates about 15,000 acres (6,000 hectares) under poppy cultivation this year in Pakistan will produce 180 tons of opium, the raw material of heroin. In neighbouring Afghanistan, where a fractious rebel

Israel won't make new unilateral gestures to Palestinians: Rabin

JERUSALEM, May 17: Arab-Israeli violence claimed six more lives as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin vowed that Israel would make no further unilateral gestures towards the Palestinians to achieve Middle East peace, reports Reuter.

"The Palestinians have exaggerated expectations for gestures without on their part making any return on the ground or at the (negotiating table)," Rabin, quoted by a government official, told the cabinet.

"Israel will make no more unilateral gestures without a return," he said.

As the cabinet met on Sunday, Palestinian gunmen firing from a car killed four vegetable dealers—two Israeli and two Arabs—near a Jewish settlement in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip.

Several hours later, during clashes in two Gaza refugee camps, Israeli soldiers shot

dead to Palestinian children— an 18-month-old baby and an 11-year-old boy.

Rabin's statement seemed to signal that he wanted the peace talks to focus on sculpting an interim period of limited Palestinian self-rule rather than on his harsh security measures.

But there was doubt whether the Palestinians, who have little to show for a year-and-a-half of negotiations but a mass deportation and sealing of the occupied territories, could accept this.

Rabin came to power, crushing the previous right-wing Likud government in elections in June 1992, after pledging to concentrate on negotiating a permanent Middle East peace.

Since then, he has presided over the largest peace-time expulsion of Palestinians and imposed a ban, now in its eighth week, against Pales-

tinians entering Israel from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Both moves responded to Palestinian attacks on Israelis. Neither ended the cycle of bloodshed. Both presented obstacles to the peace talks Rabin had vowed to pursue.

In response to the latest Palestinian attack, Rabin simply urged Israelis to avoid the occupied territories unless they were among the 100,000 Jewish settlers living there.

The Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, launched in October 1991, were suspended for several months after Israel expelled 415 alleged Palestinian militants to Lebanon in December.

Palestinians said they attended the latest round of talks, which ended last week in Washington, because they were promised Israeli gestures.

Israel has allowed 30

Palestinians deported years ago to return to the occupied territories and has offered to allow home 25 more of those deported in December in addition to the 101 it had already said could return.

But the Palestinians had expected more regarding the deported Arabs and had also demanded an end to the closure of the occupied territories.

Meanwhile, King Hassan of Morocco has said he could not rule out inviting Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to Rabat to give momentum to Middle East peace talks, but now was not the time.

"I can't rule it out but the time is not ripe," Hassan said in an interview with the French television station (FTI) that was taped last Friday and broadcast on Sunday.

The participants failed to agree on the principles of

Palestinian self-rule, the goal of the present talks, or a firm date for the discussions to resume.

An AFP report from Damascus says: Syria on Sunday ruled out a proposal from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for a summit meeting, charging it was a move aimed at bringing the Middle East peace talks to a halt.

"The proposal of Yitzhak Rabin to raise the level of negotiation is nothing new. It's a manoeuvre to halt the talks and out of the question," said state-run Damascus radio.

"If the Israelis wanted progress in the negotiations, they would clearly announce their commitment to implement the terms of reference of the peace process, namely UN Security Council resolutions and the principle of exchanging land for peace.

NZ against N-testing

WELLINGTON, May 17: New Zealand was opposed to any nation resuming nuclear testing, acting Prime Minister Don McKinnon said here today, reports AFP.

Speaking at a post-cabinet press conference, he said he saw any suggestion of the United States and France resuming testing in the same light.

"We really do not want to see anyone start testing again," he said.

He said if one nuclear nation began testing again it would be obvious that others would want to resume.

McKinnon said US President Bill Clinton was under pressure from the Pentagon, but other US federal agencies were opposing a resumption.

"So whilst there is this tug-of-war between agencies there very similar to what there was in France just a couple of weeks beforehand, one hopes that the overall goodwill will prevail and that we do not see any need for that to occur."

No confidence motion against ROK PM

SEOUL, May 17: The main opposition party on Monday introduced a no-confidence motion in parliament against the prime minister for remarks seen as supporting a 1979 army coup, reports AP.

The motion, signed by 103 opposition legislators, had little chance of passage in the ruling party-controlled National Assembly, but it could damage the government's image.

"We urge that Prime Minister Hwang In-sung be fired immediately for distorting history and damaging the nation's democratic constitutional order," the opposition Democratic Party said in the motion.

The opposition welcomed the president's clarification but said the prime minister still should be fired. The opposition demand is part of an overall anti-government political offensive.

Chun, then an army major general, staged an internal coup to seize power following the assassination of his mentor, Park Chung-hee, two months earlier.

Roh, also an army major general, mobilized units under his command to help Chun consolidate power in the chaotic days that followed Park's death. Roh succeeded Chun as president in 1988.



ZAGREB: Two young Bosnian Muslim refugees, one with a badge demanding "Stop genocide in Bosnia" listen to their teacher during Quranic class outside a refugee camp in the suburbs of the Croatian capital Sunday. —AFP/UNB photo

Students hold anti-US rally in Seoul

SEOUL, May 17: About 100 radical students shouting anti-US slogans burned an American flag Monday to demand the United States apologize for what they say was its role in a bloody military crackdown in 1980, reports AP.

Dissidents and militant students believe Washington condoned the mobilization of the Korean military to put down unrest during a 1980 pro-democracy uprising in southern Kwangju city in which about 200 civilians were killed.

The United States has denied the charge.

"Yankee go home," students yelled, kicking and punching some 200 riot police who formed a barricade to stop protesters from marching off the campus at Seoul's Kyunghee University.

There were no arrests or injuries.

Students and dissidents have demanded the civilian government of President Kim Young-sam open a new investigation into the Kwangju incident and punish those responsible for ordering the crackdown.

The claim former presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, both ex-generals, ordered the shootings in Kwangju and should be held responsible. Both have denied direct involvement.

US pledges stronger ties with ASEAN

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, May 17: The United States has pledged stronger ties with ASEAN to ensure political stability in the Asia-Pacific region, a US-ASEAN communiqué released here today, reports AP.

The communiqué, issued amid fears that a US withdrawal of interest from the region would reopen old feuds, said Washington had reiterated its enormous stake in the region's stability. The release followed two days of talks between the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Winston Lord.

The United States will "continue to base its security in the region on alliances and other bilateral security relationships, and the US is prepared to move forward with multilateral security dialogue the communiqué said.

Washington's assurances of its continued security commitment to the region came after a warning by Singapore senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew that Asia would shift its focus from economics to defence as old suspicions and animosities would resurface if the United States withdraw from the region.

"If they (the United States) pack up then all the ancient suspicions and animosities between Japan and China, Japan and Korea, and Korea and China and the fears of ASEAN for China and Japan would shift the focus from the positive which we have achieved to defence and security," Lee, who was attending a meeting of former world leaders in Shanghai, said Saturday.

Lord, at his first meeting with ASEAN officials which ended late Sunday, said current US policies signalled a renewed commitment to a stronger US-ASEAN relationship.

Senior ASEAN officials said today that any regional security forum should include China and Russia.

The forums could be used as regular brain storming sessions in the first year or two of its formation.

"Then when everybody is comfortable, we can put up proposals on the kind of arrangement and framework or even institution that the forum should be turned into," said Lim Jock Seng, ASEAN's spokesman at the US-ASEAN dialogue.

Kamil Jaafar, Secretary General of Malaysia's Foreign Ministry, said Kuala Lumpur wanted China to become part of any discussions on regional security concerns.

"As far as Malaysia is concerned, if we want to talk about security with our dia-

logue partners, we also have to talk to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and others in the region," Kamil said.

Lim said ASEAN members wanted to include China and Russia in the grouping's Post Ministerial Conferences (PMC) along with its seven major trading partners to form a post-cold war security forum.

"But we have to seek the views of our dialogue partners when we meet in Singapore," said Lim, the permanent secretary of Brunei's Foreign Ministry which hosted the talks.

ASEAN, which groups Brunei with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, holds annual dialogue, with its PMC partners, Australia, Canada, the European Community, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the United States.

Senior ASEAN officials left here today to prepare for formal security talks with its dialogue partners on May 20-21 in Singapore.

ASEAN officials said the critical situation in Cambodia, nuclear weapon threat in the Korean peninsula and conflicting claims to the Spratly islands were among the potential threats to the region's peace and stability.

Banana can reduce heart attacks

NEW DELHI, May 17: The banana is the best source of magnesium which helps reducing the death rate of heart patients, reports Xinhua.

Prompt treatment with magnesium reduces the risk of mortality in the first few weeks of irregularities which magnesium induces and the therapeutic value of magnesium in the management of heart attacks cases have come to light only recently.

Magnesium is present in figs, gumes, milk, nuts, eggs and many green vegetables but its best and cheapest source remains in the banana.

Magnesium also counters calcium in the blood and maintains it at the right thickness, facilitating proper flow.

The doctors said that it is important to guard against magnesium depletion in the body which stops an attack of diarrhoea or through the use of diuretics which are prescribed for heart patients.

Off the Record

What if homosexuals could marry?

NEW YORK: What if homosexuals could legally marry? That conversational icebreaker could soon throw bombshells across America if Hawaii permits gay matrimony as its high court says it should, reports AP.

Would other states be obliged to honour Hawaiian vows? Law and history say yes, and no. Homosexual couples who plan a wedding in Hawaii may need a lawyer when the honeymoon is over.

Constitutional and general legal principles require states to honour each other's laws. "Essentially, it is what allows us to exist as one nation, what we don't have a million different laws across the states," said William Rubenstein, Director of the American Civil Liberties Union lesbian and gay rights project.

But another important tenet says states can make an exception when the public there holds strong contrary views.

Courts weighing differing marriage laws, "as a general rule, will validate the parties' expectations if (the marriage) was valid where the relationship was entered into — unless it violates public policy," said Professor Linda Elrod at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan. She is editor of the American Bar Association's Family Law Quarterly.

But how do you measure public policy? Laws on the books are one indicator, say experts who suggest the 25 states that outlaw sodomy will have a strong argument against recognising same-sex marriages, as will those with laws specifically defining marriage as a contract between a woman and a man.

He was flogged 199 times for 'seduction'

TEHRAN: A 20-year-old man was flogged 199 times with a whip in front of a school where he "seduced" schoolgirls, the Zan-e-Rooz magazine reported Sunday, reports AP.

A court in Khorramabad, southwestern Iran, also condemned him to a one-year exile in Gonbad-e-Kavous, a Turkmen region of northeastern Iran.

Zan-e-Rooz said the young man, the son of a wealthy Khorramabad family who was only identified by his first name Reza, "seduced 14 young girls who sneaked out of school to meet him."

It urged parents to be more vigilant.

Couples with 3 children only preferred in Iran

NICOSIA: The Iranian parliament ratified a bill on Sunday aimed at limiting couples to three children, reports Reuter.

The Iranian news agency said the Majlis (parliament) passed legislation granting special government benefits only to the first three children.

"According to the bill, all privileges granted under the law to the children will not be given to the fourth child of a family who is born a year after the law comes to effect," IRNA said.

The agency did not say when the bill would take effect. Iran, ruled by clerigymen since the 1979 Islamic revolution, has a population of about 52 million. It is often praised by international organisations for its achievements in family planning and birth control.

Clerics throughout the Muslim world disagree on whether birth control violates the teachings of Islam.

US, India resume talks on N-issue in July

NEW DELHI, May 17: India and the United States decided today to resume their dialogue on nuclear non-proliferation in July, officials said, reports AP.

The decision was made at talks between US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Mallot, the highest-ranking official of President Bill Clinton's administration to visit India, and officials of the Ministry of External Affairs here.

Mallot who arrived Sunday from Islamabad, held about three hours of talks with Foreign Secretary JN Dixit, the senior most civil servant in

Pak court acquits Zardari of keeping illegal arms

KARACHI, May 17: A Pakistani court acquitted the husband of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Sunday on charges of keeping illegal arms, his lawyer said, reports Reuter.

Asif Ali Zardari, Water and Power Minister in the present caretaker government of Prime Minister Mir Balikh Sher Mazari, was acquitted for lack of evidence, the lawyer said.

Zardari was arrested after President Ghulam Ishaq Khan sacked Bhutto's government in August 1990 on disputed charges of misrule and corruption.

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