

British MPs to vote on Maastricht Treaty today

LONDON, May 19: British lawmakers will vote Thursday on the European Community's treaty on closer economic and political union, and Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd expressed confidence Britain will soon approve it, reports AP.

Denmark ratified the treaty in a referendum Tuesday, leaving Britain the lone holdout among the 12 EC members. "People can now see that the treaty... is not a blueprint for a supestate and we can now go ahead with our own parliamentary procedures which we have to complete," Hurd said Wednesday.

The British parliament has spent more than 200 hours debating "every nook and cranny" of the treaty and approval now is a government priority, Hurd said on BBC Radio.

The House of Commons will take its final vote on the treaty on Thursday, Hurd said.

The treaty then goes to the House of Lords, Parliament's unelected upper chamber, which could approve it within a month, despite strong opposition led by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. It would then be ready for Queen Elizabeth II's signature—the final step in the British lawmaking process—by mid-July.

The treaty must be endorsed by all 12 EC members, either in Parliament or by a public vote. Ten had ratified the treaty before the Danish referendum.

Britain's reluctance to move faster was due to opposition by 30-40 rebel legislators in the governing Conservative Party.

India planning to enforce martial law in Kashmir

Pak Foreign Ministry says

ISLAMABAD, May 19: Pakistan accused India Tuesday of planning to enforce virtual martial law in Kashmir and warned that the move would escalate tensions in the region, reports AFP.

"The Indian government has decided to hand over operational responsibilities in occupied Kashmir to the army and is increasing the strength of its troops in the valley by sending an additional two army divisions," it said.

"These decisions are indications of India's intentions to escalate repression of Kashmiri people," a statement issued by a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. Officials here have previously

put the number of Indian troops and border security forces in the Indian-controlled Kashmir at around half a million men.

The statement said it was "evident" that the so-called political initiative "advertised" by Indian leaders to resolve the crisis in Kashmir had "failed".

"Now the Indian army is being called upon to try to impose a final solution," the spokesman said.

"The emplacement of Kashmir valley under what amounts to martial law is bound to intensify grave human rights violations in Kashmir and could also escalate tensions in the region," he added.

Thousands of people have been killed in the Indian-administered southern two-thirds of Kashmir over the past four years in violence linked to a Muslim insurgency against Indian rule.

The two South Asian neighbours have fought two wars over the ownership of Kashmir since their independence from Britain in 1947.

Pakistan calls on the world community to ask India to halt its campaign of repression and violations of human rights in Jammu and Kashmir," the official statement said.

It also urged the international community to persuade India to "reduce rather than augment the instruments of

repression in the Indian-held Kashmir.

Demanding that India allow international human rights organisations to inspect conditions in Kashmir, the statement renewed Pakistan's offer for bilateral talks on the Kashmir tangle.

"The world community should bring political and moral pressure to bear on India so that it responds positively to Pakistan's repeated offers to open a dialogue with a view to defusing tensions and promoting a peaceful settlement of Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with international and bilateral commitments."



An intimate scene in the TV Soap opera "The Bold and The Beautiful." —Star TV photo

Watching 'sex' on TV too embarrassing

SYDNEY: An Australian television network has axed its top-rated show after the new boss found "Sex" too embarrassing to watch, reports AP.

The weekly programme features nudity as well as frank discussions of sexual practices and problems. It has attracted big late-night audiences since starting in 1992.

But the programme will end in June, the Channel Nine Network said Wednesday. "You don't want to put a family in a situation where they are embarrassed to be sitting with their children" said new network boss Bruce Oynge, a father of two daughters. "I wouldn't want to be sitting in the lounge room watching 'Sex' on this channel with my daughters," he said.

'Hillary is smart but too aggressive'

NEW YORK: A majority of American women approve of the more activist role President Bill Clinton's wife Hillary has taken in the White House, according to a poll released on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The poll, co-sponsored by McCall's magazine and the Life Time Television Cable Network, found that 69 per cent of those surveyed approve of Mrs Clinton's performance. Of those, 46 per cent said she is a "terrific role model of today's career oriented woman who also has a family."

Of the 31 per cent who disapproved of her role, the most common reasons were because she has not been elected to any office and that she is smart but too aggressive.

In addition to acting as a senior adviser to the President, Mrs Clinton is heading a task force on health care reform. Two-thirds of those polled said they thought she would have a positive effect on her husband's re-election chances in 1996.

Anti-abortion group takes over abortion clinic

CHATTANOOGA: For 18 years, protesters have picketed, prayed and preached outside the Chattanooga Women's Clinic in hopes of stopping abortions. They've finally succeeded, reports AP.

The ProLife Majority Coalition of Chattanooga bought the city's only abortion clinic in bankruptcy court. The sale was finalized Monday.

"For the time that there is a disruption in the availability of easy abortions we know that children will live," said Patricia Lindley, an executive board member of the umbrella group of anti-abortion groups in the Chattanooga area.

Lindley said a committee is studying what to do with the 8,600-square-foot (775-square-meter) building. The group hopes to have a plan by August 30. One possible use is as a memorial to aborted babies.

The clinic's sign was replaced Monday with a cross of flowers, an American flag and a sign that reads, "In memorial of the babies who have died from abortion in Chattanooga." Clinic director Virginia Lane said abortion rights advocates are not dissuaded by the sale. She said they hope to find a new site within the next few weeks.

"We will not remain closed," Lane said. "But for a while, women who want to choose are going to have to go further to make that choice."

BRIEFLY

New OIC bid to stop Afghan war:

The Organisation of Islamic Conference said it was sending a delegation to Kabul Tuesday in a new bid to halt the civil war in Afghanistan, AP report from Jiddah.

OIC Secretary-General Hamid al-Gabid said in a statement that the team was headed by his deputy for political affairs, Ibrahim Bakr.

The statement said the OIC was following with "anguish and concern" developments in Afghanistan with the escalation of random shelling and the killing of hundreds of civilians.

The statement appealed to the Afghan guerrilla leaders "to do their utmost to ensure an immediate cease-fire and to resume negotiations... to bring about peace and stability."

Gabid reminded the rival leaders that they had come to Saudi Arabia earlier this year, signed a peace pact in Mecca, Islam's holiest city and vowed "before God and the world" to respect the agreement.

US to recognise Angolan govt:

President Clinton has decided to recognise the Angolan government, reversing Washington's longstanding hostility toward the once-Soviet-backed regime, according to a published report, AP reports from New York.

The New York Times reported in its Wednesday editions that Clinton would recognise the administration of Jose Eduardo dos Santos, which is battling the rebel group UNITA for Total Independence of Angola, known as UNITA.

During the Cold War, the United States and South Africa supported UNITA in its war against the dos Santos government, which was supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba. The war broke out after the former Portuguese colony on the southwest coast of Africa gained independence in 1975.

The Times said Clinton had withheld recognising the dos Santos regime in hopes of fostering peace talks between it and UNITA. The newspaper quoted unidentified Clinton administration officials as saying they were losing hope that UNITA would continue with peace talks.

Grenade blast kills 6 in Kinshasa:

A grenade blast in Zaire's capital Kinshasa killed six people and wounded at least 15, state-owned radio and television said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Kinshasa.

The explosion took place on Monday evening in the Gamba market, the city's second biggest, the broadcasts said.

The reports gave no indication of who carried out the attack or what its motivation could have been. A Zairean soldier killed a woman market trader on March 15, hurling a grenade at her when she refused to accept a controversial five-million-Zaire note in payment.

Judge, several others held in Naples:

Police arrested a judge and several other people in early morning raids against organised crime in the Naples region, Italian GR1 state radio reported Tuesday, Reuter reports from Rome.

Police detained judge Alfonso Lamberti, currently suspended from his duties, during investigations based on testimony from turncoat Apequale Galasso.

Galasso, a former member of the Camorra - the Naples Mafia - is cooperating with the police. It is the first time a judge has been arrested in the wave of corruption arrests that have cut a swathe through Italian political life over the past 15 months.

Filmmaker Lapoujade dead:

Painter and filmmaker Robert Lapoujade, best-known for his portraits of French literary greats like Jean-Paul Sartre and Andre Breton, has died, his family announced Tuesday. He was 72, AP reports from Paris.

The date and cause of death were not specified. Lapoujade painted portraits of Gaston Bachelard, Georges Bataille and Francois Mauriac, 20th-century literary figures whom he knew well. In 1961, Sartre wrote the preface of a catalogue for an exhibition of Lapoujade's works.

Lapoujade was also known for his films, including 15 short subjects. In 1975, he won a Cesar - the French equivalent of a Hollywood Oscar - for his animated short, "Un Comedien Sans Paradoxe" (An Actor Without Paradox).

Avalanche kills 5 in Siberia:

Five tourists were killed in an avalanche in the eastern Sayan mountain range of southern Siberia, Itar-Tass news agency said today, reports Reuter from Moscow.

It gave no further details of the accident, but said heavy snow had increased the danger of avalanches in the region.



Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chief Benazir Bhutto (R) gives autographs to supporters as she sits next to her husband Asif Ali Zardari upon arrival in Lahore Tuesday. Benazir urged the president to dissolve the provincial assemblies and to hold both National and Provincial Assembly elections on the same day. — AFP/UNB photo

Benazir starts election campaign

ISLAMABAD, May 19: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) co-chairperson and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has launched a formal campaign for the forthcoming general elections to the National Assembly scheduled for July 14, reports Xinhua.

The prominent political leader said in Lahore Tuesday that her party analysis showed that elections would be held definitely and PPP had asked the candidates to submit their applications for the coming elections.

She asked interested candidates to start canvassing immediately to avert a poor turnout of voters.

She was quoted by today's local press as saying that the election campaign was necessary to end any confusion re-

garding the holding of elections on the announced date.

The PPP leader disclosed the party would form an alliance to contest the next elections but did not say with which party it will ally. Presently, PPP is the caretaker government which was formed after the dissolution of the National Assembly and the dismissal of the Nawaz Sharif government on April 18.

The PPP leader said the coming elections would be issues-oriented and would not be based on personalities so the election campaign of the party would be on three basic issues.

The issues she explained include the progressive for fundamental meaning of Islam, unity or ethnicity, and implementation of a new social con-

tract.

She said a proper interpretation of Islamic philosophy is essential for both internal and external security of the country and could not only promote democracy, give rights to minorities and women but also heed the defence of Muslim causes in Kashmir, Palestine and Bosnia.

She said her party would project a progressive Islamic philosophy.

She appealed to the people to vote for the forces of unity for a progressive and prosperous Pakistan and quoted the examples of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia which got divided due to ethnicity, saying unity we support and ethnicity we reject.

Emphasizing on adopting a new social contract, she said it

45 Tamil rebels killed in 10 weeks operation

COLOMBO, May 19: Soldiers killed at least 45 Tamil rebels and captured their bases in a 10-week operation in the eastern jungles, a military official said Wednesday, reports AP.

Five soldiers have also died after the operation began in March in Thoppaigala jungles in Batticaloa district, said military spokesman Brig Nalin Angammana.

The troops destroyed 25 rebel bases in the jungles and set up three camps to flush out the rebels, Angammana said. Guerrilla attacks on the soldiers and civilians has since declined, he said.

The rebels were mostly killed in ambushes on their camps, Angammana said. Details were sketchy.

More than 18,000 people have been killed in a decade-old Tamil ethnic war in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Tamil guerrillas say the majority Sinhalese deny them their cultural and economic rights.

No headway in govt, Solidarity talks

WARSAW, May 19: Talks between the Polish government and the Solidarity trade union have broken down, raising the prospect of a general strike, reports Reuter.

Solidarity leaders left Tuesday's talks describing them as unsatisfactory and are expected to decide today whether to call a nationwide stoppage over the government's refusal to award pay rises to striking teachers and health workers.

"The proposals presented by the government are not satisfactory for the union side," Grzegorz Jackznski, a Solidarity spokesman, told reporters.

Myanmar troops launch airstrikes on Karens

BANGKOK, May 19: Myanmar government troops have launched airstrikes, against ethnic minority guerrillas in Eastern Myanmar in a new outbreak of fighting, guerrilla sources said today, reports AFP.

Myanmar airforce PC-7s attacked Karen guerrillas in South Eastern Myanmar on three occasions between May 8 and May 12, a guerrilla official said.

A Thai military commander on the Thai-Myanmar border confirmed that there has been a recent upsurge of fighting between Karen rebels and Yangon troops in the area about 70 kilometres (43

US, DPRK may hold talks on N-dispute

UNITED NATIONS, May 19: The United States and North Korea are considering high-level discussions aimed at ending the dispute arising from the Pyongyang government's withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, US officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a working-level preparatory session took place Monday at an undisclosed location in New York between diplomats from the State Department and North Korea's UN Mission.

It was not known, however, if and when a formal session would take place.

Israeli troops kill 2 more Palestinians

West Bank, May 19: Israeli soldiers shot dead two Palestinians in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron today, military sources said, reports Reuter.

They said the two men fled into a deserted house on the outskirts of Hebron when they saw an army patrol. The army surrounded the house and fired anti-tank missiles at it when the men tried to flee. Troops shot them dead. The sources said the Arabs, who were yet to be identified, had an AK-47 automatic rifle and a large amount of Jordanian currency.

Residents said the army scaled off the city's western sector before searching caves and homes. Explosions were heard all night and helicopters red overhead, they said.



A Palestinian kisses the body of Tala Abu Atayeh, 18, during his funeral, after he was shot dead by Israeli troops in the Nuseirat Refugee Camp in Gaza Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Arabs, Israelis resume arms control talks

WASHINGTON, May 19: Arabs and Israelis resumed talks Tuesday aimed at ridding the region of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, reports AP.

The Mideast arms control talks, part of the Arab-Israeli peace talks, convened for their fourth session with some 40 countries and international organizations in attendance - including Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, North African states, European countries, Japan and UN organizations.

The idea of such broad participation is to provide Arabs and Israelis with assurances of support as they undertake the delicate issue of cutting their arsenals of mass destruction. Syria and Lebanon are boy-

cotting the talks pending progress in their direct peace talks with Israel, where they are demanding that the Israelis give up land for peace.

For the first time since the arms talks began in January 1992 a Palestinian delegation also was participating. Israel had argued until now that the Palestinians were not a country and therefore shouldn't take part in arms control talks, but changed its mind as a concession to advance its one-on-one peace talks with the Palestinians.

The arms control talks are theoretically modeled on the experience of decades of US-Soviet disarmament negotiations. The United States and Russia has been working closely with the sides to pre-

pare the sessions and guide the talks.

US persuasion is largely credited for a reduction in persistent Arab demands that arms control talks should start with Israel signing the international Non-Proliferation Treaty and opening up its nuclear facilities for inspection.

Israel is widely believed to have dozens of nuclear warheads, although it has never officially confirmed these reports.

Instead, the United States and Russia have steered the talks toward discussion of confidence-building measures among Arabs and Israelis - arguing that a reduction of arsenals could realistically occur only after peace is achieved between the sides.

Japan considers joint naval exercises with SE Asian states

TOKYO, May 19: Japan's navy, the maritime self-defence force, is considering joint exercises with several Southeast Asian countries, Chief of Staff Fumio Okabe said reports AP.

According to Japanese newspaper reports today, Admiral Okabe said he had received requests for joint naval manoeuvres from Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia when he visited the three countries last month.

He added that such exercises would be possible "as long as they fall within the scope of the friendship exercises which [the Japanese navy] has conducted so far" and consisted primarily of tactical drills.