

BRIEFLY

11 killed in Java road mishap: An intercity bus rammed into a parked truck on a north Java highway, leaving 11 people dead and seriously injuring 15 others, the Antara news agency said Thursday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

The bus, bound for Jakarta from the central Java town of Purwokerto, had been racing at high speed against a truck on the coastal highway when it rammed into the parked vehicle on the road side late Tuesday. Antara said.

A total of 11 bus passengers were killed immediately, while 15 others, including the drivers of the bus and the parked truck were seriously injured.

Sharif meets Bosnian refugees: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif met with Bosnian refugees in Islamabad Wednesday and expressed Pakistan's solidarity with their country against Serbian aggression, AFP reports from Islamabad.

"Pakistan is your own country," he told 379 Bosnian Muslims who arrived at the weekend and are living here in a housing complex built for pilgrims to Mecca.

Sharif said he was confident that Bosnia-Herzegovina would succeed in its struggle to depend its rights.

The Pakistan government plans to transfer the refugees to the northern Kaghan valley where a village is being set up for them.

Quake hits Iran: An earthquake measuring 5.6 degrees on the Richter scale hit southwestern Iran, destroying 70 homes and causing an unspecified number of injuries, the official Iranian News Agency said Wednesday. AFP reports from Tehran.

Tuesday's quake, the second in 10 days in the city of Gachsaran in Boyer-Ahmad-Kohgiluyeh Abad and Kanbal, IRNA said.

A landslide caused by the quake blocked roads connecting 11 villages.

The quake also jolted the city of Kohgiluyeh at 9.15 pm (16.45 GMT), it said.

6 Palestinians hurt in gunfire: Six Palestinians were wounded by Israeli gunfire Wednesday in the occupied Gaza Strip, Palestinian sources said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Four demonstrators were shot during clashes at the Chatil refugee camp, the sources said.

Two others were shot in the Rafah refugee camp after assailants threw a grenade at an Israeli patrol, they added.

Israeli military sources said the grenade, which did not explode, was thrown from the roof of a house.

The Israeli military later imposed a curfew on part of the Rafah camp.

Major may visit Pakistan: British Prime Minister John Major may visit Pakistan next year, a Foreign Office spokesman said Wednesday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

The spokesman said Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif would be meeting his British counterpart in Cyprus in October during the Commonwealth heads of government conference.

It would be Major's first visit to Pakistan since he assumed office in late 1990.

Iraq moves troops closer to Iranian border

NEW YORK, June 24: Iraq has moved troops closer to the Iranian border and put its air defences on high alert in its largest military mobilisation since the Persian Gulf War, the New York Times reported today, says Reuter.

The newspaper quoted US officials as saying that the flurry of activity could reflect Baghdad's fear of a new Iranian attack rather than plans for an offensive strike of its own.

The newspaper said the Clinton administration remained uncertain of Iraq's intentions, adding that officials felt the most likely explanation for the Iraqi alert were renewed tensions between Iran and Iraq.

The newspaper also quoted the officials as saying that the buildup could be seen as a mere military exercise.

An alternate scenario, it said, was that the alert may have been ordered in anticipation of a military strike by the United States for Baghdad's role in a suspected assassination plot against former President George Bush.

They said a new FBI report pointed strongly to Iraqi involvement in the suspected plot against Bush, who was reportedly targeted during a recent visit to Kuwait where he was honoured for his role in the Gulf War.

The officials told the newspaper, a final decision about a US response to the alleged plot would probably not be made for several weeks. They added that the new Iraqi mobilisation could complicate US planning.

Another report says: Iranian Vice President Hassan Habibi, replying to charges that his country seeks to undermine the United Nations, said veto powers enjoyed by select UN members were a greater threat to the organisation.

The Iranian news agency IRNA on Wednesday night said Habibi criticised the right to veto, granted to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

It said he was commenting on a statement made by a United Nations representative at the human rights conference in Vienna, who said the Islamic Republic was trying to weaken the world organisation.

"Recognition of the veto power as a right befitting only a few member states of the United Nations and denying it to others is in itself against the principles of human rights," IRNA reported Habibi as saying.

"As long as the UN suffers from that (veto) flaw it cannot truly claim to be concerned about the status of human rights," the agency quoted him as saying.

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'Nepal haven for Muslim victims of Indian riots'

KATHMANDU, June 24: When frenzied Hindu mobs attacked Muslims in India's northern Uttar Pradesh state in December, many potential victims fled to the neighbouring Hindu Kingdom of Nepal, reports Reuter.

"Nepal has been a true haven for our terrified brethren from across the border," said Jamal Khan, a Nepali Muslim who heads a trust responsible for Kathmandu's 200-year old main mosque, recently demolished for reconstruction.

Khan estimates there are three million Nepali Muslims in the world's only officially proclaimed Hindu state, although official figures put the number at 1.2 million out of the 18.5 million predominantly Hindu populations.

Most Nepali Muslims have family ties with their Indian counterparts, mainly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the two states bordering Nepal's southern Terai region. There are no controls on movement of citizens between the two countries.

"Freedom of movement helps bilateral trade. At the time of riots, the facility became a real boon for hundreds of refugees," said Hayat Hussain Nadvī, the octogenarian prayer leader at Kathmandu's Jama Masjid grand mosque.

Nadvī said Muslims in Nepal were safer than in India.

"It is much better to live peacefully in a Hindu state than to worry constantly for your life in a supposedly secular country," he said. Turtly, in reference to India's secular constitution which is under attack by Hindu nationalists.

Nadvī said Indian Muslims were victims of Hindu hysteria which was alien to Nepal.

"We are treated with respect. There is no discrimination in Nepal, said the prayer leader who had his religious

training in Lucknow, capital of Uttar Pradesh.

A large number of Nepal's Muslims arrived in the kingdom at the head of Moghul armies sent there during the 17th century reign of Indian Emperor Aurangzeb.

"This country has been giving refuge to so many people for so many years that it is difficult to count," said Qutub Ahmed, supervisor of the Islamic School in Kathmandu.

There are five mosques in Kathmandu and several more in other Muslim-dominated parts of the Hindu state.

"There is total religious freedom," Ahmed said. "The government supports us, the people respect us."

Ahmed said the 200-year old Kathmandu Mosque was razed two months ago after it developed cracks in its structure.

"Some of the labourers who are rebuilding the mosque are Hindus. That is just as it should be in a country known for its religious tolerance," Ahmed said.

Storm leaves 11 dead in Mexico

MEXICO CITY, June 24: Tropical storm Arlene unleashed downpours and high winds in southeastern Mexico Wednesday. Killing at least 11 people and leaving hundreds homeless, media reports said, according to AFP.

Rivers overflowed their banks flooding farmland and numerous towns with some 35,000 people affected, local television and radio stations said. A three-story building in the historical sector of Mexico City collapsed under the strain.

There were no casualties, although several people had to be treated for nervous breakdowns.

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Taiwan to allow 20 Chinese immigrants every year

TAIPEI, June 24: Taiwan will allow 20 leading political figures, intellectuals and athletes from China to immigrate every year, the Cabinet's Mainland Affairs Council said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

The immigration scheme, established on Tuesday, covers people fleeing China for political reasons as well as those leaving with the permission of the authorities, said Tsai Sheng-Tang, a section chief at the council.

Those, eligible, would include leaders of China's pro-democracy movement, Tsai said in an interview. Top scientists and Olympic medalists would also be candidates.

Currently, immigration from China is limited to 300 Chinese spouses of Taiwanese citizens annually, as well as Chinese older than 70 or younger than 12 with relatives on the island.

role to play in Europe, where the most serious threat was "extremist nationalism, which creates new hotbeds of instability."

He called for accelerated moves within NATO and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) that links it to eastern European States to develop joint peacekeeping capabilities.

"We would also support the participation in whatever form of NATO and the NACC in the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia — including their involvement in the peacekeeping operations," Shevardnadze said.

Abkhazia, an autonomous Republic located in western Georgia, last July declared sovereignty from Tbilisi, a move declared illegal by Shevardnadze.

Hundreds have died in the fighting that broke out after government troops stormed the Parliament in the main city of Sukhumi last August.

The latest upsurge in fighting came after a Georgian representative on Tuesday accused the Abkhazian side of refusing to wing a ceasefire agreement supported by Georgia and Russia.

Sandro Kavtsadze, the Head of the Georgian Delegation at the peace talks, said that the Abkhazian side did not agree with the conditions set for UN monitoring of the ceasefire, ITAR-TASS News Agency reported.

Shevardnadze also invited the NACC to hold a meeting in the Georgian Capital of Tbilisi to get a first-hand look at the inner conflicts raging in the former Soviet Union.

Ali mediating release of POWs between Iraq, Iran

BRUSSELS, June 24: Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze suggested Wednesday that NATO could send peace keepers to help resolve the conflict in the autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, reports AFP.

Shevardnadze made his comments during a visit to the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, where he met with NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner.

The Georgian leader said that despite the end of the cold war, NATO still had a vital

role to play in Europe, where the most serious threat was "extremist nationalism, which creates new hotbeds of instability."

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BEIJING: Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng fixes his tie as he listens to Australian counterpart Paul Keating during talks at the Great Hall of the People Thursday. Li appeared to be in good health despite renewed rumours about the state of his health. Several Hong Kong newspapers reported that Li had offered to resign as head of the Chinese government because of ill health. — AFP/UNB photo

NATO urged to help end war in Abkhazia

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Ali mediating release of POWs between Iraq, Iran

TEHRAN, June 24: Former world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali is on a mission to Iran and Iraq to mediate a release of POWs, the Iranian news agency IRNA reported Wednesday, says AFP.

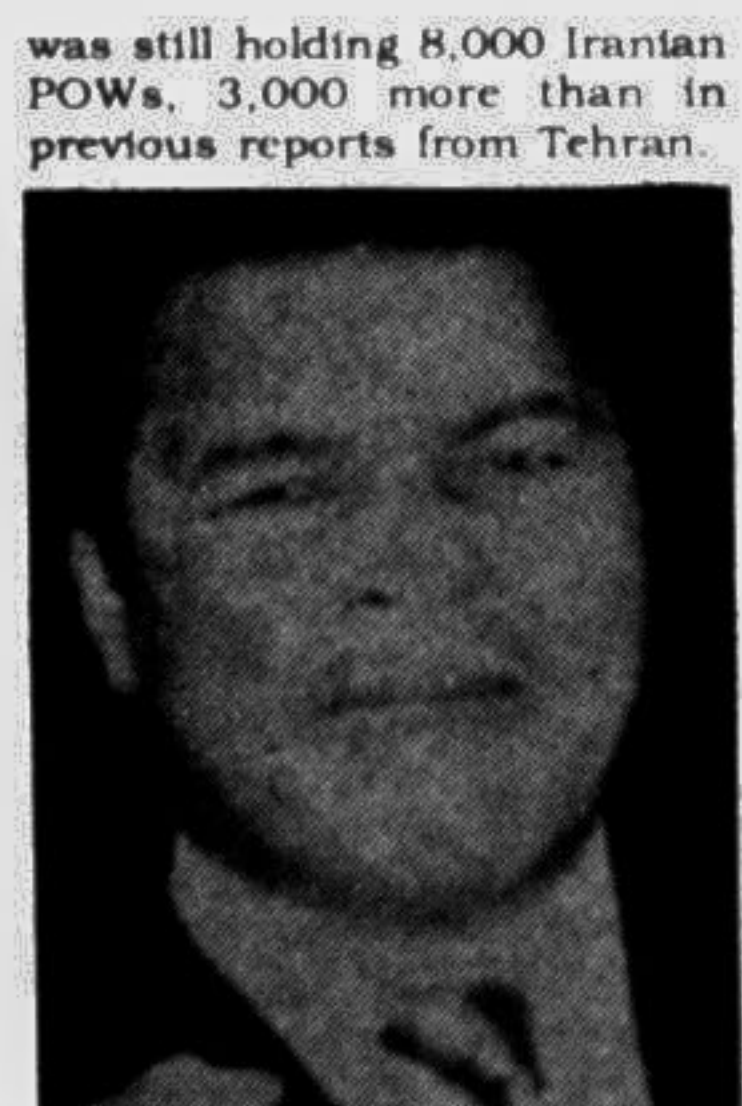
Ali arrived in Tehran on Tuesday for a three-day visit before he heads to Baghdad to seek the return of prisoners from the 1980-1988 war between Iran and Iraq, it said, quoting the Iranian Boxing Federation.

The US boxer and convert to Islam was also in Tehran on a two-week private visit last month.

The former champion was on Wednesday to attend an inauguration ceremony for the World Cup football qualifying tournament in Group B for Asia.

An official in charge of Prisoners of War, Reza Aghmini, said meanwhile that Iraq

was still holding 8,000 Iranian POWs, 3,000 more than in previous reports from Tehran.



Muhammad Ali

Israel, China seal military cooperation

JERUSALEM, June 24: Israel and China have officially sealed their military cooperation with the arrival of a Chinese Colonel at the Embassy in Tel Aviv, the mission said Thursday, reports AFP.

Colonel Xu Lin Gen recently took up the post of Military Attaché, an Embassy spokesman said, without giving a date.

The Foreign Ministry said an Israeli Military Attaché, also a Colonel, would soon be posted in Beijing.

Israel is selling China hundreds of million of dollars worth of military technology per year and training Chinese experts, according to unconfirmed foreign press reports.

The two countries set up diplomatic ties in January 1992.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who last month visited China, said he expected Beijing to keep a pledge to halt missile sales to Muslim states in the Middle East.

Yeltsin gives papers on Korean War to ROK

SEOUL, June 24: Russian President Boris Yeltsin has handed to South Korea confidential Soviet documents providing the Korean war was started by North Korea's Kim Il-Sung with Stalin's backing, officials said today, reports AFP.

Officials from the South Korean Foreign Ministry said that Yeltsin gave to South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sang-Joo some 40 pages of documents listing all telegrams exchanged between Stalin and Kim from January 1949 to October 1950, when Han went to Moscow on June 7.

The early telegrams described Kim's preparations for the southward military invasion in June 1950 with material assistance from the Soviet Union, they said.

Later communications mentioned the massive Chinese participation to the war in October of that year to repulse the United Nations forces led by the United States, they said.

Yeltsin has promised to turnover entire voluminous documents on the Korean war to South Korean President Kim Young-Sam when the latter visited Moscow sometime in the near future, they added.

Officials here said these documents would serve as an irrefutable proof to quash North Korea's allegation that the South Korean and United States forces started the war in 1950, and not the North Koreans.

More than two million people have died with the entire Korean peninsula in ruins.

Russian army suffering from mounting corruption

MOSCOW, June 24: The Russian army is suffering from increasing corruption in its top ranks, large numbers of drug addicts and a high suicide rate, according to figures published Wednesday by a parliamentary group, reports AFP.

The group called "Army Reform" accused Russian military leaders, including Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, of corruption at a press conference at which Deputy Oleg Nikonov said the reform process was a sham.

According to the group's figures corruption cases have risen 95 per cent in the past five years, while 900 soldiers, mostly young, committed suicide in the same period.

Rwandan govt puts off signing peace pact

KIGALI, June 24: The Rwandan Government has postponed Thursday's signing of a peace pact it reached at the weekend with the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a government spokesman said here, reports AFP.

Foreign Minister Boniface Ngulinzira, the chief government negotiator, was to brief President Juvénal Habyarimana and other political leaders before the accord could be signed, the spokesman told official radio Wednesday.

Ngulinzira has led Kigali's team at peace talks in the Tanzanian town of Arusha. An agreement to bring the minority Tutsi rebels into government has not been welcomed by political extremists in Rwanda's Hutu majority.

The Foreign Minister has been expected here for several days following the conclusion of 11 months of peace talks.

Kurds storm consulate, take 20 Turks hostage

MUNICH, Germany, June 24: Five Kurds stormed the Turkish Consulate in Munich today and took about 20 employees hostage, police said, reports Reuter.

A police spokesman said the attackers threatened to set the building on fire with petrol bombs if police intervened.

Police said six other Turkish offices in Munich were damaged. Two people were detained for smashing windows in a Turkish travel agency and a bank.

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Off the Record

King seeks donation for wedding

JOHANNESBURG: King Mswati of Swaziland, 25, is about to take a fifth wife and he wants local businesses to finance the wedding, the South African Press Association reported Wednesday, says AFP.

A letter front-paged in The Times of Swaziland newspaper said "permission has been granted to a special committee to ask for donations from companies and individuals for the coming wedding," SAPA reported.

Swaziland's Police Commissioner Sandile Mdziniso and two royal princes are on the committee, the agency said.

The letter in The Times, signed by the regional administrator's office of Manzini, Swaziland's second city, identified the bride-to-be as Inkhoostlak La-Magwaza. It did not say when the wedding would take place.

First Miss China to be crowned

BEIJING: The first Miss China is to be crowned this year in a beauty pageant that will include ethnic Chinese women from all over the world, the China News Service said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The competition will be open to women aged 18 to 26 years from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, as well as others residing overseas, and will evaluate the beauty, intelligence and character of the modern Chinese woman, the Agency said.

An eliminator stage is set to begin in July before the finals in December in Beijing.

In addition to Miss China and two runners-up, additional prizes will be awarded for the most friendly, photogenic and intelligent competitors, as well as awards for the most attractive in swimsuit and evening wear.

Forbidden in China as a symbol of decadence until the 1980s, beauty pageants have proliferated in the past year, particularly in the south. Catching the popular wave, Beijing is to hold its first "Miss Beijing" pageant in July.

Transplant surgery to provide cheap supplies of organs

LONDON: British scientists are breeding special pigs that may revolutionise transplant surgery by providing cheap supplies of organs, reports Reuter.

After eight years of research, scientists at the Cambridge Company Imutran revealed on Wednesday they had produced "Astrid" — a transgenic pig carrying human genes.

Transgenic pigs have been bred before but Astrid is the first to contain the human gene decay accelerating factor which may prevent a human body rejecting transplanted organs.

"What we have got is the basic platform from which to start. Now we have to perfect the strain until we arrive at a point where organs can be transplanted without being automatically rejected," a spokesman for Imutran said.

The Imutran team took a fertilised egg from a sow and injected it into a test tube with human genes before replacing it in the sow's womb.

Since Astrid was born in December, scientists have bred 32 piglets carrying human genes.