

## Abkhazian rebels agree to sign truce accord

MOSCOW, July 27: Georgian officials Tuesday said separatists in the coastal region of Abkhazia agreed to sign a cease-fire that could end fighting that has left at least 2,000 people dead, a news agency reported, reports AP.

There was no immediate confirmation from the Abkhaz side, whose declaration of sovereignty a year ago led to Georgian military intervention.

Last Saturday, Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze decided to approve the peace agreement that had been mediated by Russia.

Georgian parliament speaker Vakhtang Goguaдзе said the accord would be signed on Tuesday with Abkhazia's deputy parliament speaker Sokrat Dzindzholia and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, the Interfax news agency said.

The agreement calls for an immediate cease-fire, to be followed by a gradual demilitarization of Abkhazia monitored by UN observers.

According to the terms of the proposed agreement, Georgian troops would be withdrawn from all "conflict zones" inside Abkhazia within 10 to 15 days after the deployment of international observers.

Abkhazian separatist forces backed by volunteers from the Russian North Caucasus, who control up to one-third of the region, would be disbanded or required to leave the territory.

Georgian lawmakers had been critical of a clause allowing Abkhazia to restore its "legal institutions of power in Abkhazia." That would reinstate Vladislav Ardzinba, leader of Abkhazia's pro-independence movement, as head of the regional parliament.

Previous peace accords have collapsed, with the warring sides blaming each other for the renewal of fighting.

Abkhazia is a former resort area in northwest Georgia between the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains.

## Israel launches fresh air raid on Hezbollah targets Riyadh seeks UN intervention to stop bloodshed in Lebanon

MANAMA, July 27: Arab countries Monday condemned Israeli attacks on Lebanon, with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Yemen warning it could jeopardise the Middle East peace process, reports AFP.

In Jeddah, on the Red Sea, the Saudi cabinet chaired by King Fahd urged the UN Security Council to intervene "to put a stop to Israeli attacks and the bloodshed of which innocent South Lebanese civilians are the victims."

Riyadh was "deeply concerned, denounces the escalation of violence and the repeated Israeli attacks on certain villages in South Lebanon as well as on Syrian and Palestinian (troop) concentrations," a Saudi cabinet statement said.

"Israeli attacks undermine the peace process and disturb the stability that was starting to take root in Lebanon," the cabinet said in a statement reported by the official Saudi press agency.

Qatar and Yemen also denounced the Israeli attacks on Hezbollah and Palestinian targets which were launched Sunday. The two countries also echoed Saudi Arabia's call for UN intervention to halt the attacks.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mussa said he told his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres to "stop the attacks immediately" in a telephone conversation, the Egyptian news agency Mena reported from Cairo.

Mussa said it was important to ensure the attacks did not have a negative effect on the Middle East peace process.

Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan meanwhile cautioned that "violence can only breed violence."

He said the "spiral was not acceptable in the context of the renewed attempts by the US administration to give meaning and momentum to the peace talks."

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher starts tour of the Middle East on July 31 aimed at breaking a deadlock in Arab-Israeli peace talks.

Reuter adds from Lebanon: Israeli warplanes launched a new air raid on guerrilla targets in South Lebanon today, security sources said.

The sources said several planes bombed the village of Zibqine at Dawn as Israeli artillery maintained sporadic shelling of a string of villages where pro-Iranian guerrillas are active.

No further details were available on the latest attack.

Israel on Sunday launched its most extensive air campaign into Lebanon in 11 years. More than 37 Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians have been killed and 130 wounded in scores of air strikes and artillery bombardments since.

Two Israeli civilians were killed and 23 wounded on Sunday when guerrillas rained Katyusha rockets into northern Israel. An Israeli soldier was killed and three others wounded in a guerrilla attack in South Lebanon on Monday.

## Off the Record

### Judge signs death order with a happy face

HOUSTON: A lawyer for a death row inmate complained after a judge signed the man's execution order with a little "happy face" flourish, reports AP.

"My client was shocked by it," said the civil rights lawyer William Kunstler said Monday. "I've never seen anything like that before. Doesn't it seem terribly inappropriate?"

District Judge Charles J. Hearn added the symbol to an order setting an Oct 15 execution date for Robert Nelson Drew. The judge said it was "not intended to take away from the seriousness of anything."

"It's just become part of my signature," he said. "My driver's license is signed that way."

Drew was sentenced to die for stabbing to death a 17-year-old hitchhiker.

The happy face flourish caused a stir last year when Hearn used it on the bottom of a letter to other judges announcing a peer's death.

The 62-year-old retired from the bench in 1992. But judges are occasionally called out of retirement to hear cases. Before his retirement, the judge could sometimes be seen praying with defendants before they were led away to prison.

### Hot-air drier may invite bacteria in restrooms

LONDON: The bacteria washed away in a public restroom can come flying back through a hot-air drier, a British study says, reports AP.

But scientists don't know whether that finding, if confirmed, represents any threat to public health.

A University of Westminster study — funded by the Association of Soft Tissue Paper Manufacturers — found that hot air driers in public restrooms increased bacteria on hands more than 500 per cent. Those who used towels had fewer germs after washing.

"The vast majority of bacteria in the atmosphere in our lives are benign and are not going to have any effect. Without any evidence that these are the nasty ones, I am very cautious about sounding the alarms," said Brian Knights, one of the investigators at University of Westminster in London. The study was presented Monday at a news conference.

Dr Frank Bia, a professor of medicine and laboratory medicine at Yale University, called the study "an important piece of work."

### Blind sailor begins Trans-Atlantic Odyssey

BALTIMORE: A sailor equipped with a talking compass and Braille maps set out Monday to become the first blind person to sail solo across the Atlantic, reports AP.

Hank Dekker, 58, waded to 100 well-wishers as his 30-foot (10-metre) sailboat NFB was towed out of the city's Inner Harbour. He will be towed to Cape May, NJ, and set sail on his 3,200-mile (5,150-kilometre) trek Wednesday or Thursday.

He hopes to arrive in Plymouth, England, in 18 to 28 days and is to be greeted there by representatives of his sponsor — the Baltimore-based National Federation of the Blind. His ship is named after the organisation.

Dekker is blind in his right eye, has pinhole recognition of light and darkness out of the corner of his left eye, is deaf in his left ear and uses a hearing aid in his right. The boat contains radar, charts and other equipment especially designed for the blind.

He said he is making the journey to show the world the blind can accomplish the same things the sighted can.

"But first and foremost this voyage is for me, you have to take care of yourself," Dekker said. "For me, it's the challenge of doing things. I want to be the best sailor I can be."

### France urges Israel to stop attack on Hezbollah

PARIS, July 27: France urged Israel on Monday to call a speedy halt to its attack on Hezbollah guerrilla positions in Lebanon, reports Reuter.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said France "urges Israel to stop as soon as possible this initiative which is an attack against the sovereignty of Lebanon and threatens to endanger the Middle East peace process."

The spokesman added: "While deploring attacks against the security of Israel, to which France is committed, it believes a military operation of this scale cannot be justified and regrets the many innocent civilian victims since yesterday."

Israeli air power, artillery and gunboats hammered guerrilla positions in Lebanon for a second straight day on Monday, from north Lebanon to the south, in the most intensive air campaign against Lebanon in 11 years.

France urged countries with influence in the region, an apparent reference to the United States and Syria, to do everything in their power to restore peace, the spokesman said.



London: Members of the Franco-British one day summit (from left) British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, French President Francois Mitterrand, British Prime Minister John Major and French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur on Monday. — UNB/AFP photo

## Seoul, Taipei restore unofficial ties

TAIPEI, July 27: Taiwan and South Korea signed today an agreement to reestablish unofficial ties following an 11-month break, their Foreign Ministries announced in their respective capitals, reports AFP.

Charles King, Taiwan's former Ambassador to Seoul, and South Korean Ambassador-at-large Lee Hyon-Hong signed the accord in the Japanese city of Osaka, the statement said.

The accord was to have been concluded Sunday but was delayed by last minute hitches. Today's signing came after agreement on thorny issues including the naming of the respective Missions.

Taipei dropped its demand that its office in Seoul, with a branch in Pusan, should bear the name of "Republic of China (ROC)." It will now be called "Taipei Mission in Korea," while Seoul's counterpart will be called "Korean Mission in Taipei."

Members of Parliament from Taiwan's main opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) responded by saying that the government should learn from the experience and consider shedding its official national title in order to reestablish formal ties with other countries.

Diplomatic relations between Taiwan and South Korea were ended when the latter switched its recognition to Beijing as being the legitimate government of China last August.

Both sides agreed to negotiate details of economic cooperation.

## Delhi to consider job quota for Hindu outcastes

New Delhi, July 27: The Indian government on Monday said it would consider reserving jobs for Hindu outcastes in the country's expanding private sector, but senior industrialists said the move could deter foreign investors, reports Reuter.

Energy Minister N K P. Salve told the lower house of Parliament the government would support an opposition proposal to allow Hindu outcastes, who have statutory fixed job quotas in state-owned enterprises, to receive similar guarantees in India's burgeoning private industries. This is a serious question and we will abide by the decision of the House, Salve said.

Lok Sabha (lower house) Speaker Shivraj Patil said he would take up a discussion on the issue after a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's government was put to the vote tomorrow Wednesday.

Outcastes, formerly called untouchables constitute about 16 per cent of India's population of 870 million.

The proposed move triggered shrill warning from Indian industrialists, who said job quotas would undermine the government's economic liberalisation plans and might deter foreign investors.

The Delhi-based Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said job quotas in private industries could derail the government's economic liberalisation plans.

"As far as the CII is concerned, we have a comprehensive view against quotas, said CII Vice President Subodh Kumar Bhargava.

The CII supports Rao's plans to privatise India's unwieldy public sector industries and has played host to foreign leaders and industrialists to promote investments in India.

Delhi-based industrialist Hari Prasad Nanda agreed.

India's Supreme Court last year decided that nearly half of federal government jobs should be reserved for lower castes.

It approved a decision by former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh — whose government was toppled in November 1990 — to extend job reservations to those low down in the rigid Hindu caste system.

## Tajik rebel leader says Jihad only solution to crisis

PESHAWAR, Pakistan, July 27: A Tajik rebel leader visiting Pakistan to drum up aid for refugees from his country's civil war said on Monday the central Asian republic needed an Islamic holy war, reports Reuter.

"Jihad is the only solution," Mohammad Shiraf Himatzada, leader of the rebel Renaissance Islamic Party of Tajikistan, said when asked about reports of attacks by Tajik rebels into Tajikistan from Afghan territory.

"There should be Jihad to force them (the Tajik government) to bow before righteousness," Himatzada said in an interview.

Tajik rebels fled into neighbouring Afghanistan after defeat in a civil conflict last year. An attack on a Russian post on the Tajik border on July 13 killed 25 Russian guards.

Himatzada said the rebels were ready for talks with mediators but ruled out meeting the government, whom he called puppets depending on Russian forces.

He suggested five-party talks involving Tajik Mujahideen, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Russia, whose army helps protect Tajikistan's border under bilateral agreement with the former Soviet republic, to end cross-border attacks.

Afghan officials say unprovoked artillery attacks by Russian troops across the border in Tajikistan have killed or wounded hundreds of villagers and forced thousands to flee their homes.

Moscow accuses Afghan troops based in the northern province of Takhar of backing the rebel attacks.

Kabul has reported 400 casualties and about 6,000 people displaced by Russian attacks since the July 13 assault. Russia denies launching raids against targets over the border.

Himatzada arrived last Friday in the North West Frontier province capital of Peshawar-based for Afghan guerrillas in their 14-year "holy war" against Kabul's former Soviet-backed government — to seek donations for the estimated 60,000 Tajik refugees who have fled into Afghanistan.

"Our main demand is that the (Tajik) government should go by any means because the communists have hijacked the government," he said.

### ROK plane crash: 66 bodies recovered

HAENAM (South Korea), July 27: Rescuers winding up a search for survivors of South Korea's worst domestic air crash said 66 bodies had been recovered by this morning, reports Reuter.

But 44 people survived when an Asiana Boeing 737-500 smashed into a cliff in driving wind and rain on the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula on Monday.

The plane was carrying 110 passengers and crew — four more than listed on the manifest — on the 310 km (190-mile) flight from Seoul to Mokpo in the southwest, a local official said.

A transportation ministry official said four children on the flight were not listed among the passengers on board the twin-engine jet.

Distraught friends and relatives, some hysterical, began identifying the dead at a makeshift morgue at a primary school.

"I want my son back," a middle-aged woman cried, eyeing the still forms laid out. Another fainting. She had earlier tried and failed to find her husband in any of the local hospitals.

Search team leaders said they believed all the victims had been recovered by early today.

Rescue workers said at least 46 people, including two Japanese, lived through the impact, which tore the plane in two.



Relatives cry out their grief July 27 upon hearing news that the sister and brother-in-law of the man on left were killed in the South Korean Asiana Airliner crash near Mokpo, South Korea on Monday. — UNB/AFP photo

### 91 Vietnamese boat people arrive in Japan

TOKYO, July 27: A group of 91 suspected Vietnamese boat people reached the southern Japanese port of Kagoshima today aboard two maritime safety agency patrol boats, agency officials said, reports AFP.

The patrol boats spotted the group, including 16 children, aboard two wooden ships on Sunday off Tokunoshima Island, Kagoshima prefecture, the officials said.

The agency later instructed the patrol boats to take the boat people on board on Monday as a typhoon was approaching the area.

The officials said the 91 were meeting with immigration officials for further screening.

## Sleeping disorders cover wide range of ailments

LONDON, July 27: A good night's sleep is an impossible dream for millions of people worldwide, reports Reuter.

Despite the throngs of weary sufferers, the economic and health costs of sleep disorders are not fully recognised and most go undiagnosed and untreated, medical specialists say.

"Many people don't realise that sleep disorders have a serious impact on themselves and others," said Colin Shapiro, a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto.

"You have a lot of people who are unfit to drive due to excessive sleepiness, for example, resulting in road accidents," Shapiro is Editor of "The ABC of Sleep Disorders", a British medical journal publications book due out later this year. He and other specialists say doctors' lack of knowledge about sleep problems is often as much a handicap to their resolution as that of the sufferer.

"Medical education in sleep disorders is minimal, even in North America where there has been much more interest in them in the last 10 to 15 years," said Gregory Stores, reader in clinical psychiatry and sleep disorder researcher at England's Oxford University.

"There is clear evidence that his interest is confined to a limited number of centres and medical and other professional education, such as nursing or psychology, has lagged far behind."

"An attempt is currently being made to correct that but there is a long way to go. That's very strange in view of the fact that sleep disorders are so common throughout the population and also extremely troublesome."

Sleeping disorders cover a wide range of ailments from the more common — like snoring and insomnia — to sleep terrors, sleepwalking and sudden infant death syndrome.

Researchers point out that even the relatively rare sleep disorders such as narcolepsy — a condition marked by sudden attacks of sleep — are more common than multiple sclerosis or parkinson's disease. Yet the public generally knows more about the effects of those illnesses.

A report by the US National Commission on sleep disorders research, "Wake up America," said it was time to recognise the staggering impact of sleep disturbances on the health and welfare of society, an impact that rivalled smoking.

In recognition of such concerns President Bill Clinton signed into law a bill creating a sleep institute in the United States.

The economic effects of sleep-related problems are difficult to quantify but are generally agreed to be substantial.

One study placed the annual cost in the United States alone at 16 billion dollars. This included such things as loss of productivity, time off work and the institutional care of the elderly who were unable to remain at home because of sleep-related disruptive behaviour.

The personal costs can be equally devastating.

Several studies have found that insomnia — which affects between a quarter and a third of the population at some point each year and between 10-12 per cent of people chronically — is as powerful a predictor of early death as obesity.

Severe snoring — notably obstructive sleep apnoea, which involves repeated blockage of the upper airway — also carries a high risk of death, especially from cardiovascular disease.

Other effects of sleep-related health problems range from reduced daytime performance, to damaged social relationships, psychiatric illness and road and work accidents.

Medical professionals agree that great strides have been made in the treatments available for all sleep disorders, although many are still not offered to patients.

In the case of insomnia, for example, doctors are often still too quick to prescribe sleeping pills, again due to insufficient training in sleep medicine.

"Prescribing sleeping pills is often ineffective and infact may make a bad situation worse, so it's a pity that all the other possible treatments are not better known," said Stores.

Depending on the cause of insomnia, other options include psychological or drug treatment for depression or anxiety, changes in the sleeping environment or routines before bed.

"There is a whole list of things that may be extremely relevant in the individual case," Stores said.

Stores and others recommend that if someone believes their doctor is not dealing satisfactorily with their sleep problem they should ask for a reference to a specialist or a sleep clinic.

### Serb attack deliberate, says Ghali

UNITED NATIONS, July 27: Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali condemned Monday what he called a deliberate attack Sunday by Bosnian Serbs on a French unit of the UN protection force in Sarajevo, reports AFP.

"I demand that such actions against UNPROFOR and against the population of Sarajevo cease immediately," the UN chief said in a statement released in New York.

An armored UN troop transport vehicle was destroyed and four others were seriously damaged in the heavy artillery attack by Bosnian Serbs. There were no UN casualties reported in the offensive, the statement said.