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John Demjanjuk smiles in Israel's Supreme Court Thursday as he was acquitted on appeal, more than five years after he had been sentenced to hanging as "Ivan the Terrible," an infamous gas chamber operator at the Treblinka death camp. — AFP photo

A victim of mistaken identity Demjanjuk now a free man

JERUSALEM, July 29: Israel's Supreme Court on Thursday ruled unanimously that John Demjanjuk was not the Nazi death camp guard known as "Ivan the Terrible," overturning his conviction and death sentence, reports AP.

The court also found Demjanjuk innocent of any other war crimes. The ruling set Demjanjuk free, and the police minister said he would be deported.

The court ruled that Demjanjuk, 73, was not the sadistic gas chamber operator at Treblinka death camp who tortured prisoners on their way to death.

Chief Justice Meir Shamgar said the court sifted through all the evidence presented in the seven-year case.

"True, the memory of the Holocaust shakes every Jew to the bone, but a judge must overcome these emotions when seated in a ruling," the Chief Justice read from the bench. "The defense has raised doubts and the prosecutors cannot help us resolve these questions," he said during the two-hour reading.

Outside the courtroom about 150 people watching on closed circuit television shouted in amazement at the final decision in the 16-year case.

Shouts of "Can you believe it?" and "It's amazing" rang out inside the Supreme Court building.

Demjanjuk, surrounded by the docket by police in blue uniforms, showed no emotion, sitting listening to the translation of the ruling from Hebrew in headphones over his bald pate.

He had appeared tense before the ruling was read. He glanced around the oval courtroom packed with 375 journalists and spectators.

Shamgar said the five judges weighed convicting Demjanjuk of other crimes because of evidence presented that he served as a guard at other camps including the Sobibor death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland.

"We saw no room to hold him for another crime," Shamgar said.

Thus ends only the second major war crimes trial to be held in Israel.

The Demjanjuk case came 25 years after the hanging of Holocaust mastermind Adolf Eichmann. Nazi hunters had said an acquittal of Demjanjuk could dampen efforts in the West to try Nazi war criminals.

Death camp survivors who testified against Demjanjuk were stunned.

"I am in deep shock. The judges have made a mistake. They have done an injustice. That is him, the war criminal," said Josef Czerny, one of five Treblinka survivors who testified against Demjanjuk. Three were in the courtroom Thursday.

The High Court judges had to weigh the testimony of the survivors who identified Demjanjuk as their tormentor "Ivan," against 32 Treblinka guards who accused another man. Some 850,000 Jews were killed at the camp in 1942-43.

Demjanjuk, a retired American autoworker, was convicted in 1988 "without hesitation or doubt" on the strength of the survivor testimony. Prosecutors also presented a Nazi identity card in Demjanjuk's name from the Trawniki training camp for guards. The card doesn't mention Treblinka, but says Demjanjuk was dispatched to the Sobibor death camp.

Demjanjuk says he was a victim of mistaken identity and spent most of the war in German captivity.

In a dramatic turn midway through the appeal, Israel won access to a Soviet KGB file which yielded depositions given after the war by 37 Treblinka guards and forced labourers. The guards said "Ivan" was a different Ukrainian named Ivan Marchenko. Some identified Marchenko in photographs. The guards were later executed in the Soviet Union as war criminals.

Marchenko's fate is not known.

Benazir backs govt move to probe abuse of bank loans

ISLAMABAD, July 29: Former Premier Benazir Bhutto supported Wednesday a reported move by Pakistan's caretaker government to investigate abuse of bank loans by influential people, reports AFP.

Such a probe should cover all aspects of the last decade's "fraudulent transactions" involving state-owned and privatized banks as well as other financial institutions, she said in a statement.

Reports, which were not officially confirmed or denied, said the government had called for lists of borrowers who failed to pay back or managed to get huge loans written off by state institutions.

The government plans to debar big tax evaders and defaulting debtors from standing in the elections scheduled for October, the reports said. In a warm-up for campaigning expected to take off next month, Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and her arch rival, former Premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) have started trading allegations. Leaders in both major political camps have accused each other of financial fraud and corruption during the periods in which they ruled.

Bhutto's 20-month stint in office ended with her dismissal in August 1990, while Sharif quit prematurely this month following a long power struggle with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan who also resigned under an army-mediated deal.

"It is an unfortunate fact that since 1985 the country's financial institutions have been subject to severe political pressures," Bhutto said in her statement released by the PPP here. Loans were obtained without fulfilling required criteria and collateral and instances of politically-motivated loans being written off were widely reported, she said.

"All such instances have involved politically influential individuals and families who rode to power on the back of martial law," Bhutto said.

This was an apparent reference to Sharif who rose to power in his home province of Punjab in the early 1980s during the rule of the late military ruler General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, reaching the premiership in November 1990.

Bhutto said some individuals had enriched themselves at the expense of national financial institutions, using their political influence which "has become the scourge of our political system."

"The large-scale use of money in politics has also opened the doors for drug money in electioneering," she said.

She demanded that the probe should include an impartial inquiry into the collapse of private cooperative finance societies during Sharif's government, which deprived thousands of people of their deposits.

The PPP blamed the scam on alleged heavy borrowing by Sharif's industrialist family and his political allies, but an inquiry by a judge, carried out on his orders, exonerated him.

Bhutto also demanded the recovery of loans written off fraudulently from "formerly powerful persons and their cronies."

The Midnight File Fighting rages on in Bosnia despite ceasefire

SARAJEVO, July 29: Fighting raged on in Bosnia today after leaders of the republic's three warring factions agreed yet another truce. Minutes after Muslim, Serb and Croat politicians agreed a ceasefire at talks in Geneva, shelling erupted in Sarajevo. Artillery pounded the area of Zuc, a strategic hill overlooking Sarajevo from the north, with explosions audible every few seconds, a Reuters correspondent in the city said.

Military chiefs of the rival factions were expected to meet later in Sarajevo to implement the ceasefire due to have come into force immediately.

Kashmir militant commander shot dead

SRINAGAR (India), July 29: Indian soldiers shot and killed the commander of a militant group in Jammu-Kashmir state after taking him into custody, witnesses and his family said Thursday. But the military said he was killed in a shootout. Sajed Ahmad Mir, 22, leader of the Tehrikul Mujahideen, one of the five top guerrilla groups fighting for independence in Kashmir valley, was arrested Wednesday by soldiers who were searching Lal Chowk, the centre of Srinagar, the witnesses said, reports AP.

UNGA expresses sympathy for flood-hit people

UNITED NATIONS, July 29: United Nations General Assembly has expressed its "deepest sympathy" to the victims of natural disasters in Bangladesh, USA, Japan, India and Nepal, reports BSS.

It has also expressed the hope that the international community would show its solidarity and respond promptly and generously to any request for help by the affected countries.

The UN General Assembly meeting yesterday to admit Andorra to the membership began its work with a statement by the President of the session expressing deepest sympathy to the governments and peoples of Bangladesh, USA, India, and Nepal struck by floods and Japan — recently struck by earthquake.

The statement noted that "these major disasters have caused tragic loss of lives and extensive material damages."

JUTA blames

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It decided that all the teachers of the university would abstain from taking classes and all other administrative duties until punishment of the "identified terrorists," a judicial probe and the restoration of academic atmosphere.

The JUTA also condemned the Vice-Chancellor for his "negligence" in providing security to the campus inmates and said the VC had lost his moral right to remain in office.

Flood situation

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In Sylhet, Kishoreganj, Sunamganj and Narsingdi was still not satisfactory.

The handout contradicted reports of flood-related epidemics anywhere in the country.

Relief operation is being carried out in all affected areas, it added.

Eighty-six medical teams have been working in the flood-hit areas of Kurigram district where 900 people have been affected by diarrhoea and another 160 by dysentery.

Severe erosion has hit several thanas of Brahmanbaria district, affecting some 37 thousand people, according to reports received in Dhaka.

Our Sylhet correspondent said that the flood situation in his district had remained unchanged.

UNB adds: The flood situation in Jamalpur district improved further although erosion by the river Jamuna had increased with recession of water.

About 2,000 people in Dewanganj and Islampur thanas were rendered homeless by the erosion during the last 48 hours, official sources said.

About 10,000 people in 50 unions of seven thanas were affected and 5,000 rendered homeless by the deluge in a week.

Relief materials were yet to reach the victims, local people said.

US jets

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and Sciences-Research, Hamam Abdul Razzak who told me that a gesture of goodwill like opening files (one supplier of nuclear material) could be a good start for technical talks in New York" scheduled for late August or early September.

The latest Iraqi pledge was an "encouraging development," Zifferero said.

Shibir, JCD clash in Kushtia

KUSHTIA, July 29: Police opened fire to disperse a mob which chased Islami Chhatra Shibir activists into the local police station after a clash here today, reports UNB.

The clash between the Shibir and the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) led to violence in the town when transport workers and other people joined hands with the JCD activists.

Witnesses said today's trouble erupted when some JCD supporters allegedly passed unkind remarks during a procession of the Shibir members protesting the closure of the Islamic University.

On July 24 the authorities closed the university till August 5 apprehending trouble between the two rival groups.

The Shibir processionists, blasting crackers, locked in battle with JCD supporters near the Mazampur bus stand. Transport workers and other people lent force to the activists of the ruling BNP's student front and chased the Shibir men who took shelter inside the Kotwali thana.

Dhaka deplures

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bombing in the Southern Lebanon, the spokesman further said that Bangladesh upholds the principles of sovereignty, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, non-use of force to settle interstate disputes and territorial integrity of nations enshrined in the UN charter.

The continuous ruthless bombing of the civilian population in the Southern Lebanon by the Israeli armed forces not only constitutes a flagrant violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon but also a gross violation of basic human rights, the spokesman said.

Sharif won't go for alliance

PESHAWAR, July 29: Former Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif said here today his party would eschew a political alliance for the October national election, reports AFP.

But he kept the door open for electoral cooperation with individual parties in exchange for reciprocal support.

Sharif expressed confidence that the nation would return him to power.

Sharif said the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) decided to shun alliances because of its experience in the multi-party Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad (JI), which won the last 1990 election under his leadership.

In apparent reference to fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), he said some parties in the JI had opposed his government on vital issues, ignoring the discipline and programme of the alliance.

Ji sever links with Sharif last year and has launched a Pakistan Islamic front to gather fundamentalist groups on a single platform for the polls.

Move to unite left forces

Star Report

Mujahidul Islam Selim said his party's programmes incorporate formation of a left Democratic Front for a progressive democratic transformation of the society.

"We want unity of the genuine left movement for which we have initiated discussions," he said, adding that such discussions would continue.

Selim is leading the CPB faction after the party's formal split on 15 June last.

Another faction of the CPB, led by Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, is now involved in the process of forming a new party along with Dr Kamal Hossain's followers, the NAP and other political elements.

A move to unite the left-wing political parties has been initiated with the first round of discussion held between the leaders of the Workers Party and Communist Party (hardliners).

Haider Akbar Khan Rano, Acting General Secretary of the Workers Party and Mujahidul Islam Selim, General Secretary of the CPB discussed possibilities of a unity at a meeting held Tuesday at CPB's Purana Paltan office. Some other leaders of the two parties were also present.

When contacted, Haider Akbar Khan Rano said that this was a "semi-formal" meeting where they exchanged views on the issue.

"We had only preliminary discussions which are to be followed by more serious talks", said Rano, who is also a prominent leader of the Five-Party alliance, a left-leaning association that groups the Workers' Party, the JSD (Inu), the BSD (Khaleque), the BSD (Mahbub) and the Srantik Krishak Samajbadi Dal. The alliance came into existence in 1986.

Rano said that his party favoured a broad-based unity of left forces to uphold the cause of the working people and to "fight imperialism."

Plan to set up Maritime Division

The 12th meeting of the standing committee on Foreign Affairs yesterday considered the proposal to set up a complete Maritime Division for the better use of our maritime resources, reports BSS.

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman presided over the meeting, held at the Sangsad Bhaban.

To observe the present position of Rohingya refugees, the committee members will visit the Rohingya camp on August 17 and 18. The members expressed their satisfaction over the Rohingya repatriation process.

IFRC team due today

George Wever, acting Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), will arrive here today leading a two-member delegation on a three-day visit to Bangladesh, reports BSS.

JP rift

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"I have called the meeting to discuss various problems affecting the party and to reorganise it."

He, however, said he was ready to call off next Sunday's meeting provided "Mizan Chowdhury first resigns."

Meanwhile, the JP presidium met, which continued till 11:30 last night, was adjourned till 4:00 pm this afternoon.

JS probe

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used to fly for London on August 1 for treatment and is supposed to return home by the last week of next month, sources in the Parliament secretariat said.

All the legislators of the 15-member committee barring Jute Minister Hannan Shah, Workers' Party leader Rashed Khan Menon and Opposition Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim were present at the meeting held yesterday evening at the Speaker's official chamber.

10 BIWTC employees jailed in N'ganj

From Our Correspondent, NARAYANGANJ, July 29: Ten employees of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) were sentenced in absentia here today to suffer 10 years' rigorous imprisonment each for misappropriation of government wheat.

Additional District and Sessions Judge and First Special Judge Mohammad Najmul Ahsan, while pronouncing the verdict of the case regarding misappropriation of 610 bags of wheat nearly seven years ago, also fined each of the convicts Tk 1,35,000 or to suffer imprisonment for another two years in default.

The convicts, Siddique Mahmud, Fakrul Islam, Anwar Hossain, Rafiqul Mowla, Rafiqul Islam, Dil Mohammad, Noor Mohammad and Altaf Hossain, all employees of the BIWTC have been absconding.

According to relevant authorities, the Assistant Commercial Officer of the BIWTC filed a case with the Bandar police after finding that 610 out of 7,217 bags of wheat were missing from a barge of the corporation while en route to the Narayanganj CSD godown from the Chittagang river port on October 26, 1986. The accused — the captain and nine crew of the river craft carrying the goods — fled after anchoring the vessel at the local CSD godown after misappropriating the 610 bags of wheat.

APP Humayun Kabir conducted the prosecution.

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