

BRIEFLY

A Montreal newspaper closed:

The debt-burdened Montreal Le Devoir newspaper suspended operations Saturday after failing to reach a cost-cutting plan for the 83-year-old publication, AP reports from Montreal.

The closure put about 100 people out of work and silenced one of Quebec's main forums for political, cultural and social debate. Although its circulation was just slightly above 30,000, its influence exceeded its size and was widely read in political and academic circles.

But publisher Lise Bissonnette held out hope the French-language newspaper could return.

Extremists kill 3 cops in Egypt:

Three policemen, including one general, were killed in Nagaa Hamadi, 535 kilometres (320 miles) south of Cairo, by suspected Islamic fundamentalists, police said, AFP reports from Egypt.

The attack was at 8.50 pm (1750 GMT). Assaults fired 60 times at a car carrying General Mohammed Abdel Hamid Ghabara, a bodyguard and a driver, police said.

Eyewitnesses said there were three attackers.

Zemin greets Hosokawa:

Chinese President Jiang Zemin has welcomed the election of Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa, ruling out any change in the close ties between the two neighbours, the newspaper Asahi reported Sunday, AFP says from Tokyo.

"Although we may have not been familiar with Hosokawa in person, we wish him well in performing his duties as premier," Jiang was quoted by the daily as saying in an interview in Beijing on Friday.

Jiang, concurrently Chinese communist party chief, added, "whatever happens to the political situation in Japan, the friendly relations between China and Japan are in keeping with the trend of the times and the drift of the public sentiments."

Li recovering steadily:

China's ageing paramount leader Deng Xiaoping is in good health and Premier Li Peng has been recovering steadily from illness, Chinese President Jiang Zemin said in an interview published in Tokyo Sunday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

"I can say it with responsibility that comrade Deng Xiaoping is in good health," Jiang was quoted by the influential Japanese newspaper Asahi as saying, brushing aside rumours that the 88-year-old leader was seriously ill.

Jiang, also the Communist Party chief, who assumed the state presidency in March, said Li was making a fine recovery from heart problems.

Forest fire kills 2 in Italy:

Two people were burned to death in their car when they were caught in a forest fire near Pisa, in northern Italy, as hot weather and arsonists combined to pan blazes across the country, police said Saturday, AFP reports from Rome.

In another incident, three women suffered serious burns in a forest fire in the Olbia region of Eastern Sardinia where a number of camping sites had to be evacuated. Coastguards and fishermen helped to ferry hundreds of tourists stranded on a beach.

And in the Abruzzi mountains, a fire was reported to be advancing along a 20 kilometre (12 mile) front in the Aquila region. The government has called on the army to stand by in case it is needed to fight the blazes.



ANC military commander, Joe Modise (front) takes the salute on Saturday in Ipelegeng, the black township outside Schweizer-Reneke at the same time as AWB (Africaner Resistance Movement) members were granted freedom of the town. — AFP photo

Rafsanjani forms new cabinet

TEHRAN, Aug 8: President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani presented a new cabinet to Iran's Majlis (parliament) today with seven changes including the Interior and Defence ministers but leaving key finance, oil and foreign portfolios intact, reports Reuter.

Rafsanjani, who was sworn in on Wednesday for a second four-year term, named his 23 man team in a letter read in an open session of the assembly.

The Majlis will vote on individual ministers after up to 15 hours of debate. It was not immediately known when the debate would start.

The changes were more limited than what the Majlis conservative majority had demanded and apart from the interior ministry, which is a highly political post, mostly brought in new technocrats.

The radical Salami newspaper quoted an unnamed Majlis deputy as saying wide agreement had been reached on the

list announced by Rafsanjani after weeks of public and back-room lobbying.

There was no immediate indication from the conservatives on whether they were willing to endorse all the proposed ministers.

Their newspaper Resalat said two weeks ago the Majlis majority wanted 12 of the ministers changed, including oil minister Gholam Reza Azagadeh and economy and finance minister Mohsen Nourbakhsh.

Meanwhile AFP added, Conservatives, who became a dominant political force after their parliamentary victory last year, have been demanding Rafsanjani sack the technocrats appointed to oversee his free-market policies and choose ministers more in tune with the right-wing majority in parliament.

But pressure to change course has also come from Islamic hardliners and Islamic left-wingers.

Serbs strengthening positions on two strategic mountains

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Aug 8: Despite promises to withdraw, Bosnian Serbs on Saturday were reportedly strengthening positions on two strategic mountains overlooking Sarajevo, reports AP.

By digging in, Serbs could directly challenge NATO resolve to move ahead with threatened air strikes to end the siege of Sarajevo, which came under some Serb shelling Saturday.

"What we are seeing is that the Bosnian Serbs are consolidating up there. There are no movements at this time to withdraw," said UN spokesman Cmdr. Barry Frewer.

The Serbs were unable to reach agreement on the withdrawal during six hours of talks Friday with the Muslim-led government. A new round of talks is planned for Sunday. Disputes emerged over where Serb front lines were prior to their advance last week on Mounts Bjelasnica and Igman. UN civil affairs chief Viktor Andrejev said.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his commander, Gen. Ratko Mladic, had promised Thursday to withdraw from the two mountains and open two routes for civilians and aid convoys.

The NATO military committee met Saturday in Brussels, Belgium, and the alliance's governing body, the North Atlantic Council, will review plans for military action against the Serbs at a meeting Monday.

Serbs also want to bring the Muslim-led government back to talks in Geneva. President Alija Izetbegovic is resisting pressure to agree to a division of Bosnia among the three warring factions and he made the Serbs' withdrawal from the two mountains a condition for resuming the talks.

But Karadzic's fighters remain firmly entrenched around the capital.

Frewer reported shelling Saturday from Bjelasnica, the taller, more distant peak, on Bosnian government forces withdrawing from Igman.

Later Saturday, Bosnian radio reported heavy shelling of government positions around the Serb-held town of Hadzici at the base of Mount Igman. There were indications that government forces had launched an offensive, but this could not be officially confirmed.

The rest of Bosnia, including Sarajevo, remained mostly calm on Saturday, UN officials re-

ported two shooting incidents involving British troops in central Bosnia.

On soldier was wounded in the shoulder by sniper fire near Gornji Vakuf, Frewer said.

Late Saturday, Bosnian TV reported heavy fighting between Croat and government forces at Crni Vrh, near Gornji Vakuf. No details were given.

Repair missions, meanwhile, succeeded in restoring water to the western part of the capital. New pumps also were providing water at a well in the old town, on the east side of the city, which has been without running water and electricity most of the summer.

The streets were filled with people carrying containers of water to their apartments on bicycles, wagons, or on foot.

Also Saturday, two more Bosnian towns were added to the 7-month-old aid airdrop programme, said Peter Kessler, a spokesman for the UN High Commissioner of Refugees in Sarajevo. The towns of Maglaj and Tesanj have been cut off from aid convoys for two months, he said.

More than 2 million people have fled their homes in Bosnia's 16 month war, which has left up to 200,000 dead or missing. The prewar population was 4.3 million.



A Bosnian Serb soldier holds ready his heavy machine-gun as he looks towards Bosnian army positions in the Serb-controlled district of Grbavica, a neighbourhood that remains a Serb stronghold inside Sarajevo Saturday. — AFP photo

Shri Lanka opposes UN intervention to end Tamil problems

COLOMBO, Aug 8: Shri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe today rejected a peace initiative by four Nobel Prize winners proposing United Nations intervention to end the island's ethnic bloodshed, reports AFP.

The Nobel laureates proposed that Shri Lanka's warring separatist Tamil Tiger Guerrillas and the government should invite the UN Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali to mediate a settlement to the island's conflict.

Wickremesinghe, who had been given a copy of the peace plan, said the government was opposed to external intervention in the complex problem of the Tamil fight for an independent homeland.

Plea to resist 'Yankee imperialism'

LA PAZ, Aug 8: Cuban President Fidel Castro touted his country's strength in the face of a 31-year-old US economic embargo Saturday and urged Latin American countries to unify against "Yankee imperialism," reports AFP.

Cuba has resisted "A power by which many people and governments have been brought to their knees," he said in a speech given as a guest of the mayor of the Bolivian capital.

Though his tone recently has grown more conciliatory in what analysts see as an attempt to ease Cuba's isolation.

They want to arrange and impose their plans the world over," he said, citing the UN operation in Somalia as an example. "Where today they are bringing food at gunpoint to a people they have starved to death."

This is a matter for the Shri Lanka government. The United Nations (if at all) must help the government (in its efforts). There is no need for (UN) intervention or observers," Wickremesinghe told AFP.

The weekend press here gave wide coverage to the proposed peace plan signed by the four Nobel Prize winners — George Wald of the US, Mairead Maguire of Britain, Ilya Prigogine of Belgium and Jan Tinbergen of Netherlands.

They were suggesting among other things, a UN monitored ceasefire between the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and government forces in the island's embattled northern and eastern regions.

President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga also told reporters shortly after his election on May 7 that he believed it unnecessary to involve the United Nations of any foreign power to resolve the ethnic conflict.

Thousands of people have died in bitter fighting since the LTTE's launch of its Bush War in 1971 to establish an independent Tamil homeland in the island's northern and eastern regions where minority Tamils are concentrated.

The violence escalated after the LTTE blew up 13 soldiers from the majority Sinhalese community in July 1983 triggering a violent backlash against minority Tamils. Since then, the conflict has been claiming a daily death toll.

An opposition Tamil group, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) said it was suspicious of the credentials of the international organisation which initiated the peace move but welcomed UN intervention.

"We are supportive of international mediation in resolving the ethnic question in Shri Lanka. But a political settlement cannot exclude others in a multi-party, democratic society. The Nobel laureates' initiative was under the umbrella of an organisation called the World Council for Global Cooperation based in Toronto, Canada, press reports here said adding that its International Secretary is Shri Lankan Tamil who has now obtained Canadian citizenship.

"Never again will we of our own volition place ourselves as a region at the mercy of any central government, regardless of who is at the helm," he said at a ceremony at the Hluhluwe game reserve, south of the Mozambique border.

Buthelezi, who is also Chief Minister of the KwaZulu black homeland, explained that the region's riches were being used to fund projects elsewhere in South Africa, while Natal-KwaZulu remained "a Cinderella province."

China denies export of 'dangerous chemical' to ME

BEIJING, Aug 8: China has issued a strong protest to the US envoy here over the obstruction of a ship allegedly exporting dangerous chemicals, saying it was "unjustifiable bullying," that threatened bilateral relations, reports AFP.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry urgently summoned US Ambassador Stapleton Roy Saturday to protest against "groundless accusations" since July 23 that the cargo-liner Yinhe — or Milky Way — was carrying thiodiglycol and thionyl chloride to the Middle East, the People's Daily said.

The ship left the north-eastern Chinese port of Dalian on July 15, the official daily said. Assistant Foreign Minister Qin Huasun said the United States had ignored China's repeated assurances it banned such exports in accordance with the chemical weapons convention, the Daily said, adding Chinese investigations had shown the US information to be unfounded.

Qin said "arbitrary" US actions to prevent the ship reaching its scheduled ports had left it adrift on the high seas, where it was being pursued and photographed by US warships and military aircraft.

China has repeatedly proposed constructive solutions, including joint inspections of the cargo by Chinese personnel and local customs officials at the ship's first unloading port in the Middle East, Qin was quoted as saying.

However, the ship had still not received permission to dock and was faced with extreme difficulties," the report said.

"The Chinese side lodges a strong protest against the US side over the latter's act of utterly unjustifiable bullying" and again demands the US side take immediate measures to enable the ship to enter its scheduled ports to unload, the daily cited Qin as saying.

The actions "cast new shadows over the relations between China and the United States," it said, accusing Washington of breaking international law by moving against another sovereign state on the basis of fabricated information.

Veerappan faces revolt from own men

NEW DELHI, Aug 8: India's most wanted outlaw, Veerappan, is facing a revolt from his own men as elite paramilitary troops track the elusive bandit in the jungles, press reports said today, according to AFP.

Police said Saturday in Madras, the capital of southern Tamil Nadu state, that some of Veerappan's associates were planning to kill him and surrender, the Hindu newspaper said.

Police on Friday captured seven members of Veerappan's gang who disclosed during questioning that a rebellion was brewing against the outlaw, the daily said.

They attributed the revolt to desperation resulting from a shortage of money and food as troopers of the Border Security Force (BSF) keep them on the run in the forests of Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Karnataka state.

Off the Record

Souvenir earns more than entry tickets

LONDON: Buckingham Palace earned more from souvenirs than entrance tickets when Queen Elizabeth's official London home was opened to the public for the first time in 230 years, reports Reuter.

Only 4,314 people paid to tour the palace on Saturday. The adult entry fee is eight pounds (12 dollar) children and old age pensioners pay less.

But the souvenir shop earned 35,000 pounds (52,140 dollar) as tourists, many from overseas, stocked up on gifts to commemorate their once-in-a-lifetime brush with the royal family.

One Japanese visitor was reported to have spent more than 1,000 pounds (1,500 dollar) on mementos which range from chocolates and coffee mugs to jewellery and silk ties.

The poster is too risque for Japanese

TOKYO: A poster showing a naked man from the back proved too risque for some Japanese commuters, reports Reuter on Sunday.

Tokyo underground authorities had to withdraw the poster after mostly middle-aged male passengers complained that the poster was vulgar and tasteless, the English-language daily Japan Times reported yesterday.

The poster depicted an athletic foreign man from the buttocks up, wearing only a pair of headphones and with musical notes wafting out of his bottom, the paper said.

The poster's aim was to discourage passengers from playing portable cassette players too loudly on the underground and disturbing other people, the Japan Times said.

Posters showing naked or semi-clothed women are common in Japan, occasionally sparking cries of sexism among women's groups, "but the outcry over the nude male poster is new," the paper said.

New way to clear beggars

EDINBURGH: Edinburgh's "tourist police" have found a new way to clear beggars from busy streets at the height of the holiday season — they charge them with fraud, reports Reuter.

One man sitting outside a big store with a placard saying "hungry and homeless" was charged with fraud after a police check found he had a home in the city.

Inspector Paul Gilroy told a newspaper on Saturday he would bring similar charges whenever necessary. Large numbers of beggars had created an image problem for the Scottish capital, he said.

There has been a significant drop in the number of beggars in central Edinburgh in recent weeks. Gilroy denied his special unit, set up to fight city centre crime during the tourist season, had made beggars a prime target.

Begging is not a crime in Scotland though it is an offence to harass or obstruct passers-by.

Accused of drinking cat blood

PENSACOLA: Three men accused of killing cats in satanic rituals face animal cruelty charges, reports AP.

One suspect told investigators cult members drank cat blood after an animal sacrifice, said police Sgt Jerry Potts.

The remains of at least eight mutilated cats have been found in the city since July 17, and Potts said there may have been others.

The cats were choked, stabbed or beaten to death, probably near a suspected ritual site, although some remains were found in their owners' yards.

The men charged Thursday and Friday allegedly drove around residential neighbourhoods looking for cats, Potts said.

"It was like, 'Come here, kitty, kitty,' and they took them," he said.

The suspects were identified as Richard M Cottita, 25, Roger Grunder, 19, and Gregory Allen Scudder, 23.

Cottita told police the three men participated in a cat sacrifice that included drinking blood, Potts said.

Brezhnev's son-in-law released

MOSCOW, Aug 8: Former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's son-in-law was pardoned and released from a Ural Mountains prison, where he was serving a 12-year sentence for taking bribes, news reports said Saturday according to AP.

No reasons was given for Russian President Boris Yeltsin's pardon of Yuri Churbanov, news of which took 11 days to reach the prison in Nizhny Tagil, 850 miles (1,350 kms) east of Moscow, newspaper reports said.

Commonwealth television said Churbanov had returned to Moscow, but did not say what his plans were. His wife, Galina, reportedly lives outside the capital.

A former deputy interior minister, Churbanov was convicted December 30, 1988 of taking nearly 91,000 roubles in bribes after a nearly 4-month-long trial that exposed corruption at the highest levels of the Kremlin.

Iran receives 2nd Russian-made subs

TEHRAN, Aug 8: Iran has taken delivery of its second Russian-made submarine, Iranian Navy Commander Admiral Ali Shamkhani was reported as saying today, reports Reuter.

"The submarine, which entered Bandar Abbas waters on Thursday, increases the navy's defence capability in Southern waters," Salam newspaper quoted Shamkhani as saying.

Iran, the only gulf state operating submarines, ordered three kilo-class vessels from Moscow in a deal worth more than 600 million dollars.

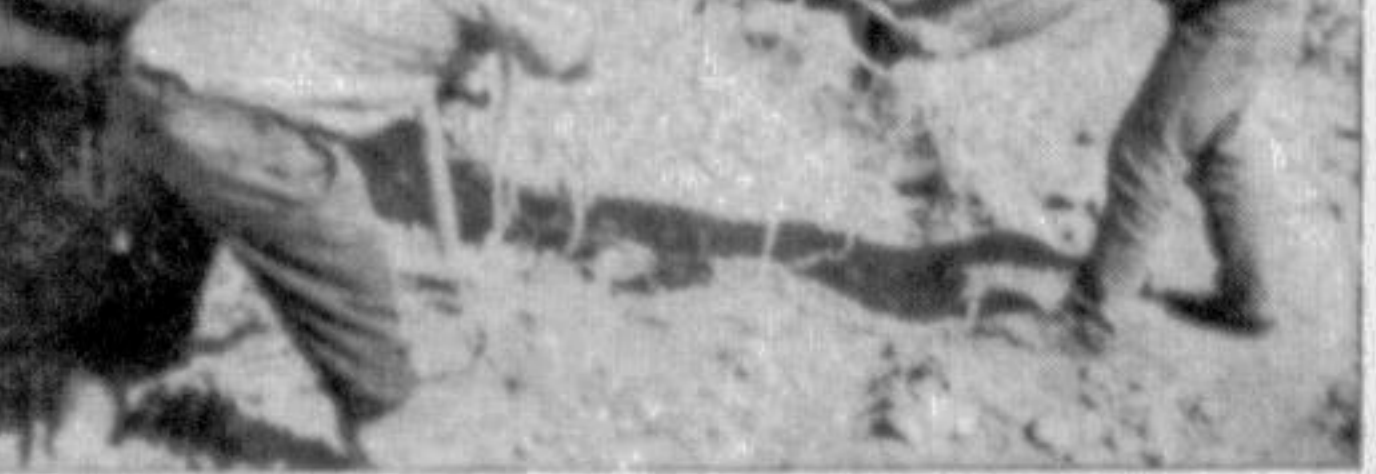
But military experts said last week the Iranian navy still needed years of training to be able to closely patrol the approaches of the strategic Gulf waters, conduct for more than a third of the World's oil trade.

The Russian submarines were loud and very difficult to go undetected inside the shallow Gulf, they added.

Iran received the first of the diesel-powered submarines in November and operates it out of Bandar Abbas, a port at the mouth of the Gulf. It showed off the vessels on exercise in April in the northern Gulf.

Iran's Gulf Arab neighbours, wary of Tehran's ruling clergy, have made no secret of their displeasure with its ambitious rearmament programme and are currently looking at offers to purchase western-made anti-submarine equipment.

Since the deployment of the first submarine, Britain and the United States, which have traditionally maintained a large naval presence in the region, have sent nuclear-powered submarines to the Gulf.



Lebanese Shiite Muslim pitch a tent on Saturday in front of their house which was destroyed by Israeli shelling during the seven days war two weeks ago. Iran's spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has ordered a special fund to be established to assist the victims of Israel's recent bombardment of South Lebanon. — AFP photo