

Zairean troops go on looting rampage

KINSHASA, Aug 13: Zairean troops have gone on a looting rampage in the northern town of Lisala, angered over a four-month delay in payment of their wages, several sources said here Thursday, reports AFP.

Several of the soldiers were arrested and others were on the run from the authorities following the looting spree overnight Tuesday, the sources said, without detailing the extent of casualties or material damage in Lisala, nearly 1,400 kilometres (868 mile) northeast of Kinshasa.

The looting came seven months after a similar rampage by troops in Kinshasa, in which up to 500 people were reported to have died, including the French Ambassador to Zaire, Philippe Bernard.

Meanwhile reliable sources in Kinshasa said troops in Kisangani, in upper-Zaire province east of Lisala, had given their superiors an eight-day ultimatum for payment of salary arrears.

In other developments, the Zairean opposition is planning to launch a campaign on Sunday to "galvanise the population for a series of resistance actions against the dictatorship" said Roger Gisanga, interim president of the opposition holy alliance coalition, following an extraordinary meeting of the umbrella grouping.

"We want direct talks without any intermediary," said MPR first Vice-President Banza Mukalay.

Delhi police blamed for '84 anti-Sikh riots

NEW DELHI, Aug 13: A two-judge panel has accused police of actively covering up widespread looting and killing during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in the Indian capital, in which almost 3,000 people were killed, the Pioneer newspaper reported today, says Reuter.

"Violations of law and the prescribed procedures appeared to be motivated by dishonest intentions," the newspaper quoted the report as saying.

The report, submitted to the Delhi administration earlier this month, buttresses the widespread belief that police actively colluded with rioters in spreading the worst violence since the British-ruled subcontinent was divided into the independent nations of India and Pakistan.

The violence was sparked by the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984.

Angry mobs attacked Sikhs in Delhi and other cities in north India over the next four days, looting property and killing almost 3,000 people, most of them in Delhi.

Witnesses have said the attacks were coordinated, in some cases by local leaders of the ruling Congress Party. The police were told to stay away, they have said.

The judicial panel said police did not properly register reports of the violence, allowing many offenders to escape punishment during trial. Preliminary reports were not registered and investigation was "absolutely casual, perfunctory and faulty," it said.

The Pioneer said at least 298 police officers had been cited, and the government has been asked to take disciplinary action against them.

Sikhs form about three per cent of India's 880 million people, but live mainly in the northern parts of the Hindu-dominated country. The population also includes some 100 million Muslims.

At least half a million people were killed in rioting which broke out when the subcontinent was divided in 1947 into Islamic Pakistan and Hindu-majority India.

Sikh couple shot dead in Punjab

CHANDIGARH (India), Aug 13: Sikh militants shot dead a Sikh couple in the Indian state of Punjab overnight Wednesday, the first such killing in about two months, police said Thursday, reports AFP.

Two militants gunned down Harpal Singh and his wife at the door of their house at Sidhwan Bet village, nearly 150 kilometers (93 miles) from this Punjab capital, a senior police officer said.

The gunmen, who had AK-47 assault rifles, escaped on a scooter. Harpal Singh was a former village chief.

It was the first such killing in some two months in Punjab, where security forces have dealt death blows to the Sikh separatist campaign this year. Scores of militants have been killed or arrested.

Off the Record

A silly cow

LONDON: A British van driver swore at Princess Diana and called her a "silly cow" after she forced him to screech to a halt to avoid hitting her, the Daily Star newspaper reported on Friday, says Reuter.

Diana, estranged wife of heir to the throne Prince Charles, was leaving a hairdresser in London's fashionable mayfair on Thursday when she spotted a photographer lying in wait.

The paper, quoting eyewitnesses, said Diana ran into the road to avoid the photographer and almost collided with a van.

The furious driver swore before leaning out of his window to shout "get out of the road, you silly cow." Diana yelled back before leaping into her car, accompanied by a detective.

Last week Diana shouted at a photographer "you make my life hell" after he took pictures of her leaving a cinema with her two sons, William and Harry.



It angers church but amuses viewers

NETHERLANDS: A sculpture of a sexually aroused naked man that reveals itself for only seconds at a time is drawing amused viewers and angering the church across the Arnhem street, reports AP.

The self-depiction by British sculptor Mark Quinn stands hidden behind two layers of opaque glass in a telephone box — until an electric impulse opens a shutter between the panes and exposes the statue.

"We have received very positive responses for the sculpture, especially from the women. They love it," said Let Geerling, spokeswoman for the Sonsbeek 93 Exhibition that set up the statue in June.

"The artist deliberately contrasts this Dionysian image with the church opposite," says promotional literature on the exhibition.

But the Domes Church opposite, part of a strict wing of the Dutch Reformed Church, is not amused.

"If a naked man stands in the middle of the square, the Arnhem police will immediately arrest him. Why is this different?" asked Jan van der Jagt, a director of the church council.

He said many worshippers have complained. The church has asked City Hall to remove the exhibit.

City and church officials plan to discuss the statue at a meeting this month.

New condom to create sexual sensation

NEW YORK: A transparent condom designed to allow better sexual sensation than latex condoms do is scheduled to go on sale in the United States next year, a British-based company said Thursday, reports AP.

The newly developed polyurethane condom is made of thinner material than latex condoms are, and tests with users showed it allowed greater sensitivity, company officials said.

The polyurethane condom can also be used with oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly and mineral oil, that should not be used with latex condoms because they weaken latex, the company said. The new condom will also avoid the latex allergy some people have, said Alan Woltz, chairman of London International Group PLC.

Unlike condoms made from lamb tissue, the polyurethane product blocks viruses that cause AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, Woltz said. The polyurethane condom will be less expensive than the company's lamb product, he said, but more expensive than latex condoms. He declined to discuss its price.

The so-called female condom is already made of polyurethane. Contraception experts said a polyurethane male condom is an advance.

"I'm very excited that here is now an alternative to latex condoms which will be effective at preventing the transmission of the HIV virus," said gynecology professor Dr Robert Hatcher of the Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta.

It's just hideous

LOS ANGELES: Actor James Caan is furious over a report linking him to reputed Hollywood Madam Heidi Fleiss, reports AP.

"It's shameful and it's harmful," Caan said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press on Thursday. He was reacting to a New York Post story, claiming Caan "often spent time partying at Fleiss' swanky mansion."

"It's not true! I've had enough bad publicity in my career. I don't need this. I've got a wife and 2-year-old baby. I don't go out and party. I don't want to be trashed. It's just hideous," Caan said.

Caan said he once met Fleiss years ago, but "I never, ever once partied at Heidi's house. I was there once, stopped by with friends, for about five minutes. That was it. I have never partied up there."

The New York Post story said Fleiss "was hopelessly in love with Jimmy" and the infatuation drove her to appear "with some of her harem" at a 16th birthday party for Caan's son, Scott.

The New York Post article said Fleiss' prostitutes wore "tight jeans, bustiers and pumps" and they drank liquor and smoked cigarettes with Caan's son and his friends.

The Post cited as its source one of Fleiss' former call girls. The newspaper also quoted Caan's publicist Paul Bloch as saying that Caan's acquaintance with Fleiss was limited and they never had an affair.



President Bill Clinton points out people in the crowd at Stapleton International Airport to Pope John Paul II upon his arrival on Thursday. The Pope is visiting the Mile High City to celebrate the World Youth Day. — AFP photo

Suharto reduces sentence of Timorese leader

JAKARTA, Aug 13: Indonesian President Suharto today reduced the sentence of jailed East Timorese guerrilla leader Xanana Gusmao from life imprisonment to 20 years, State Secretary Mardiono said, reports Reuter.

"Xanana Gusmao was given clemency by changing his jail term which is presently life to 20 years," Mardiono told reporters.

Xanana, 45, leader of Fretilin guerrillas fighting against Indonesian rule in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, was jailed for life in May after a controversial three-month trial in Dili, 2,000 km (1,250 miles) east of Jakarta.

Human rights groups and Portugal condemned the trial as a farce. Xanana's lawyer submitted an appeal for clemency. Although it was not clear whether the Xanana himself had approved it.

Indonesian troops invaded the eastern half of Timor in 1975 and annexed it the following year.

Cambodians kill 18 Khmer Rouge

PHNOM PENH, Aug 13: Cambodian government forces launched a counter-offensive on Khmer Rouge strongholds in central Cambodia, reportedly killing 18 guerrillas and capturing some 75 others, UN and government officials said today, reports AFP.

"We taught them a very good lesson. It was a great success," a government general, who declined to be identified, said.

The general said government troops responded to Khmer Rouge attacks on their forces in the stung area of Kompong Thom, repelling them about 50 kilometers (30 miles) north to Kroya.

His version was substantiated by a diplomatic source who said Khmer Rouge guerrillas closing in on stung town and national route 6 over the last three weeks had reportedly displaced 5,000 Cambodians with a heavy artillery campaign.

UN military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel John Weiland confirmed that government troops had launched an offensive on Khmer Rouge controlled areas early this week.

The government troops attacked guerrilla strongholds in the Kroya and Sakreem districts of the militarily contested province of Kompong Thom in central Cambodia, Weiland said.

"National army of Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge) forces retreated into the jungle around Sakreem," he said.

But deputy minister of public security Sin Sen said the government forces killed some 18 guerrillas and captured about 75, some of whom were villagers armed by the radical faction.

Government troops destroyed more than 100 weapons stored in a warehouse during the attack and confiscated 300 other weapons as well as 68 rocket-propelled grenades, the general said. "Two of our soldiers were killed and four to five wounded," he said.

Morocco imposes media blackout during Bush visit

RABAT, Aug 13: Morocco imposed a media blackout on a visit Thursday by former US President George Bush, the target of an assassination attempt in Kuwait earlier this year, reports AP.

Press photographers were allowed to take pictures of Bush as he arrived by a Moroccan plane from Madrid, but government officials declined to give any information on the daylong private visit.

Bush made no statement before he was driven from the airport, official sources said. He met in the afternoon with King Hassan II at the royal palace and was to leave the country later in the day.

Details of the encounter were not disclosed.

The king was among Arab leaders who committed troops to Operation Desert Storm, the US-led offensive during 1991 Gulf War that crushed the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

During a high-profile visit to Kuwait in April, Bush was targeted by a foiled assassination plot.

BRIEFLY

3 die as royal copter crashes: A Royal Air Force helicopter on a training flight crashed into a lake in North Wales Thursday, killing three cadets and injuring the three crew and another trainee, AP reports from London.

Police divers retrieved the three bodies of two young men and a young woman Thursday night from the lake, an RAF spokesman said. Three crewmen and a 16-year-old woman cadet were taken to hospital with back injuries.

Scores of vacationers saw the yellow Wessex helicopter spiral, then plunge into Llyn Padarn, a natural lake on the edge of the town of Llanberis, 9 miles (14 kms) southeast of Carnarvon. It sank rapidly.

Myanmar flight from Sunday: Myanmar Airways International, the first joint venture between the Myanmar government and a foreign company, on Sunday will start flights to Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong, AP reports from Bangkok.

The venture was formed with Highsonic Enterprise PTE Ltd. of Singapore in February. The airline will fly six times a week from Yangon to Bangkok, three times to Singapore and twice to Hong Kong on Boeing 757-200 aircraft hired from Royal Brunei Airlines, the state-owned New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported Friday.

The aircraft will use Royal Brunei Airlines pilots and maintenance technicians.

Cholera attacks more in Russia: Nearly a dozen new cases of cholera were reported around the former Soviet Union on Thursday, bringing the number of reported cases to more than 80, AP reports from Moscow.

Officials in some war-torn former Soviet republics have blamed dislocation and a breakdown in public services for the outbreaks of the highly infectious and a breakdown in public services for the outbreaks of the highly infectious and sometimes deadly disease.

The worst epidemic has been in Tajikistan, where authorities have reported more than 60 cases, including six deaths. They said the epidemic originated in Afghanistan, where tens of thousands of Tajiks fled to escape civil war.

Quake shakes Afghanistan: More than 200 homes were razed in Afghanistan's northern province of Badakhshan by an earthquake which struck last Monday and also jolted parts of neighbouring Pakistan and India, the official Kabul radio said on Thursday, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

The broadcast, monitored in Islamabad, said the quake caused "heavy loss of life and property" in Badakhshan's Jurm district, but gave no casualty figure.

A Pakistani seismological centre said the quake measured 6.6 on the Richter scale and was centred in Hindukush mountains on the Pakistan-Afghan border.

Fire at Beijing store: Firemen extinguished a blaze early Friday that tore through a major Beijing department store overnight. Xinhua news agency reported, AFP says from Beijing.

The fire at Longfu Mansion, in which several people were injured, was extinguished at 5:00 AM (2:00 GMT Thursday), nearly seven hours after it began at 10:10 PM Thursday, the agency said.

Xinhua said the fire had been brought under control by 2:00 AM by 1,000 firefighters and policemen.

15 die in Turkish-Kurdish clashes: Clashes between separatist Kurdish guerrillas and Turkish security forces claimed 15 lives, the Anatolia news agency reported Thursday, AP says from Sirnak.

Victims of the overnight fighting included 10 Kurdish guerrillas, two government armed village guards, two villagers and a soldier in three separate incidents in the provinces of Sirnak, Van and Mus, Anatolia said.

Southeastern Turkey has seen intense fighting in recent weeks between the guerrillas of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and government troops engaged in a major offensive against them.

9 executed in Shanghai: Nine people were executed in Shanghai for murder, robbery, kidnapping and rape, the Beijing-run Hong Kong China news services said Friday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The court sentenced the nine to death at a public rally in Shanghai on Thursday and they were swiftly sent to the city as execution grounds, the news service said.

Another four were also sentenced to death, but their execution was delayed to allow time for appeal.

A Filipino mayor held on charge of rape

MANILA, Aug 13: A controversial mayor was arrested Friday in connection with the rape and slaying of a college student, one of several highly publicized cases that have raised a public clamor to restore the death penalty, reports AP.

Police said Antonio Sanchez, mayor of Calusan, 75 kilometers (45 miles) southeast of Manila, was taken into custody but was not immediately formally charged. He says he is innocent.

They said Sanchez's driver claimed he drove the mayor to a secluded resort last June where he raped Eileen Sarmenta, 20, before turning her over to his bodyguards.

Yasukuni still a painful symbol of Japan's militaristic past

TOKYO, Aug 13: Its name means "peaceful country," and on a heat-stunned summer day the Yasukuni Shrine, tucked among cherry trees near the Imperial Palace moat, has a tranquil air, reports AP.

But every August, controversy swirls around the weathered wooden Shinto Shrine, where nearly 2.5 million Japanese war dead, including executed war criminals, are worshipped as deities.

Sunday marks the 48th anniversary of Japan's unconditional surrender that ended World War II, and the day is traditionally one for pilgrimages to the shrine. But to many, Yasukuni is still a painful symbol of Japan's militaristic past.

Every year, Japanese government officials wrestle with the question of whether to pay their anniversary respects at the shrine. This year, the question is particularly troublesome, as the new coalition government struggles to shape a policy on wartime accountability.

Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa has indicated his government will more forthrightly accept responsibility for the suffering Japan inflicted during the war. News reports have said the government is considering a formal apology for aggression against other Asian nations.

But the shrine dilemma is resulting in some mixed messages. Hosokawa says he himself won't go to Yasukuni on Sunday, but that members of his Cabinet are free to make private visits. Some say they intend to do so.

Some observers believe there is lingering insensitivity on the part of Japanese leaders to the anger that wartime symbols like Yasukuni can arouse.

There is still considerable stubbornness about fully accepting what was so apparently Japan's (wartime) role," said Dr. William Kelly, a Japan specialist at Yale University.

Seven convicted war criminals from World War II are among those enshrined at Yasukuni, including wartime Prime Minister Hideki Tojo.

Established in 1869, the shrine played an important role in the government's effort to promote militarism before and during the war. It was a center of the ultranationalist brand of Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion.

After the war, American occupiers removed the shrine from government control. Today, its priests liken it to war memorials found in any country.

The last prime minister to make an official visit to the shrine was Yasuhiro Nakasone, in 1985. That touched off protests from countries including China and South Korea, and set off a series of long-running legal battles.

Earlier this year, a high court avoided ruling on the constitutionality of Nakasone's visit, and rejected demands for damages brought by dozens of relatives of war dead.

Despite its calm and leafy setting, with silence broken only by the buzz of cicadas and the cooing of doves, there is no mistaking the Yasukuni Shrine as a military monument. Displays at an adjacent museum include bullet-riddled uniforms and an aircraft and "human torpedo" of the type used on suicide missions.

Li Aiguo, a Chinese student whose grandparents were killed in World War II, said he found the displays somewhat disquieting.

"It's not such a good atmosphere," he said. "It's hard to tell if the Japanese are very sorry for what happened in the war."

Akihito start European tour Sept 3

TOKYO, Aug 13: The government announced Friday that the emperor and empress will visit Italy, Belgium and Germany during a September 3-19 tour, reports AP.

The imperial couple will leave Tokyo on September 3, for Rome, where they will meet with Pope John Paul II and Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, according to the Imperial Household Agency.

On September 10-13, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko will visit Belgium to meet with King Albert before moving to Germany, where the couple will spend the rest of their visit, the agency said.