

Lanka to raise 10 more battalions

COLOMBO, Aug 17: The Sri Lankan army plans to raise 10 more infantry battalions to fight with Tamil separatist guerrillas in the islands north and east, military sources said today, reports Reuter.

They said the decision was made after the rebels overran an important army garrison in northern Sri Lanka last month, killing 40 soldiers and capturing a large amount of arms and ammunition.

The 80,000-strong army, fighting to crush a 10-year-old separatist rebellion by minority Tamils, has more than 30 infantry battalions, the sources said.

Despite a nearly 10-fold increase in size over the past 10 years, the army is still short of manpower to hold ground

against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and still conduct operations, military analysts say.

On Monday the rebels freed a policeman they had held captive for the past three years on the Jaffna peninsula, their northern stronghold.

The rebels say they want the government to lift an embargo on supplying batteries, fuel and medicine to Jaffna in return for releasing 31 prisoners.

The government has rejected the demand, saying the rebels use the batteries for land mines, which account for 70 per cent of army casualties, and supplies of fuel and medicine will also end up in rebel hands.

The prisoners last week ended a two-week hunger strike to press for their freedom.



A Thai rescue worker uncovers the body of a unidentified foreign man in the rubble of a hotel on Monday which collapsed and has so far claimed the lives of 91 people. Speculation about the cause of the disaster has been focusing on three newly installed, and filled water tanks on the roof of the illegally extended hotel. — AFP photo

Jayalalita's speech a threat to secede : Congress

NEW DELHI, Aug 17: Ruling Congress members of parliament on Monday cautioned the Chief Minister of southern Tamil Nadu state over what they said was a threat to secede over a river water dispute, reports Reuter.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalalita, in an independence day speech on Sunday, demanded "justice" from New Delhi and more water from the Cauvery river in neighbouring Karnataka state.

"New Delhi's river water policy will endanger India's unity," she said in her latest blast in the long-running dispute with Karnataka. "Nobody who really believes in safeguarding our hard-earned freedom would weaken our sense of national unity this way."

Ruling Congress Party Deputy Jayanthi Natarajan told the upper house on Monday

Jayalalita's speech was a threat to secede and "the government must respond forcefully."

Home (Interior) Minister Shankarrao Chavan said he would try to solve the water



dispute, but added: "This does not allow Jayalalita to make this kind of threat." He added: "We will investi-

gate what she actually said and take all the necessary action accordingly."

Jayalalita last month called off a hunger strike after a minister assured her a prompt resolution of the water dispute.

Jayalalita's All-India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIMDK) party followed up her protest by voting against Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao in a no-confidence motion last month.

Rao survived the motion narrowly, but his Congress Party colleagues have been calling for Jayalalita's dismissal since then, accusing her of corruption.

Jayalalita says the annual monsoon rains, lashing much of northern India and causing floods in several states, have eluded her drought-prone region, forcing her to press for more river water from Karnataka.

BRIEFLY

Congo lifts emergency: A month-old state of emergency in Congo was lifted Monday but a dusk-to-dawn curfew will remain in force in the capital, a broadcast statement said, AFP reports from Brazzaville.

The measures were introduced when violence erupted over the results of elections held in May and June.

Supporters of President Pascal Lissouba and the opposition signed an agreement on August 4 to repeat the second round of the elections which the opposition initially boycotted. The polls were officially won by Lissouba supporters.

Japan to host AIDS Confce: Japan will host a world conference on AIDS next year that organizers hope will draw attention on the disease's explosive growth in Asia, AP reports from Tokyo.

About 10,000 people are expected to attend the 10th International Conference on AIDS in Yokohama August 7-12, organizers said. It will be the first time for the annual meeting to be held in Asia.

While AIDS has shown signs of stabilizing in the United States and Europe, the disease is predicted to grow rapidly in Asia. "It is important to spread awareness of the AIDS explosion in Asia and discuss methods of control, including the role that Japan can play," the chairman of the organizing committee, Yuchi Shikawa, said Monday.

British actor dies of cancer: Actor Stewart Granger, one of the leading men of British films in the 1940s, died on Monday of cancer, a hospital spokesman said. He was 80 years old, Reuter reports from Los Angeles.

Granger died at St John's Hospital and Health Center in the Los Angeles suburb of Santa Monica after a lengthy battle with the disease, a hospital spokesman Gary Miercureanu said. The British-born actor trained at the Webber-Douglas School of Dramatic Art and started his career in British films as an extra in 1933.

Five ROK coalminers killed: Six coalminers buried more than a mile underground for almost four days were rescued Tuesday, but five died within an hour, news reports said, AP reports from Seoul.

The miners were trapped in the rubble of a collapsed mine 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) underground while working Friday near the coal mining city of Taebaek, 190 kilometers (114 miles) east of Seoul.

Yeh Jong-uh, 32, the sole survivor, said he and others survived for 91 hours by drinking rain water that had dripped down from above, Yonhap, the national news agency, reported.

AP's 3 new appointments: The Associated Press has announced appointments of a new correspondent in its Warsaw, Poland, bureau and news editors in Johannesburg, South Africa, and Sydney, Australia, AP reports from New York.

Paul Alexander, news editor in Sydney since 1990, has been named correspondent in Warsaw, succeeding John Daniszewski, whose appointment as chief of bureau in Johannesburg was announced earlier.

Tina Susman, who has been assigned to Johannesburg since 1990, has been elevated to news editor there, succeeding Greg Myre, recently named chief of bureau in Islamabad, Pakistan. Peter Spielmann, now assigned to the International Desk in New York, moves to Sydney, replacing Alexander as news editor there.

4 Germans die of Pak mountain: Four German climbers have died on high northern Pakistani mountains, two of them after scaling the world's second tallest peak, K-2. Expedition members and Pakistani officials said on Monday, Reuter reports from Islamabad.

Experienced climbers Reinmar Joswig and Peter Metzger were lost while returning from the 8,610-metre (28,250-foot) K-2 summit they had reached on July 30 and their bodies had not been found, a member of their expedition said.

"We presume they are dead" Expedition member Ernest Eberhardt said. They probably slipped on their way down and got buried in the deep snow. None of us really know what happened to them as the rest of the expedition was ahead of them."

Pope arrives back in Italy: Pope John Paul arrived back in Italy Monday after a week-long trip to the United States where he crusaded against abortion, Reuter reports from Rome.

The 73-year-old pontiff, who attended World Youth Day festivities in Denver, Colorado, also made brief stops in Jamaica and Mexico during his US trip.

A Boeing 767 carrying the Pope on his entourage touched down at 1350 GMT at Rome's Ciampino Airport.

US court rejects appeal to free Abdel-Rahman

NEW YORK, Aug 17: A federal judge rejected a request Monday to free Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman. He said it is reasonable to regard the blind cleric as a "danger to the security of the United States," reports AP.

Judge Charles L. Brieant found all of Abdel-Rahman's claims "without merit."

He ruled "there is no basis for disturbing" findings by an immigration judge and the Board of Immigration Appeals that the 55-year-old Egyptian citizen can be deported.

Brieant said the judge and the appeals panel had "reasonable grounds for regarding the petitioner as a danger to the security of the United States."

The judge delayed deportation for 10 days to allow the Sheik's lawyer, Barbara Nelson, time to appeal. Nelson did not immediately return a telephone message for comment Monday.

"We are disheartened but not surprised," said Mohammad T. Mehdi, head of the American-Arab Relations Committee. "The decision of the judge is a response to the total anti-Muslim prejudicial environment."

"Regrettably, the reaction to the decision may be more hijackings and violence against

America in the Muslim world," Mehdi said.

Abdel-Rahman surrendered last month to federal authorities and is detained at the federal prison in Otisville. Nelson had asked Brieant to restore his immigration status and to order him released from prison.

Some of his followers were arrested June 23 when the FBI raided a site where preparations allegedly were under way to bomb the United Nations, the federal building housing the FBI and two tunnels under the Hudson River.

Other followers had been arrested earlier in the February 26 bombing of the World Trade Center, where six people died and more than 1,000 were injured.

Abdel-Rahman has denounced the trade center bombing and has said he has no connection to either case.

In his ruling, the judge noted a 1992 letter describing Abdel-Rahman as the spiritual guide and founder of an extremist group that provoked hundreds of violent incidents between July 1988 and June 1992.

The letter from the director of the Office of Asylum Affairs of the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs said

Abdel-Rahman's "adherents... have been responsible for conducting several spectacular terrorist incidents, including the assassinations of President Anwar El-Sadat (1981) and the speaker of the People's Assembly (1990).

The letter noted it was accompanied by a classified letter "which summarizes information available to the US concerning the continuing involvement of Abdel-Rahman in terrorist activities which could have detrimental foreign consequences for the US government."

The cleric entered the United States as a visitor on December 16, 1990, and applied to be made a permanent resident a year later. On April 8, 1991, he was made a permanent resident as a "minister of religion."

The Immigration and Naturalization Service lifted the Sheik's legal permanent status in March 1992 after he was found to have concealed that he was a polygamist, that he had 10 children rather than four and that he had falsified a check.

Nelson said the polygamy charge was reversed on appeal and the six children he failed to mention were all adults.

US may seek third party inspection of Chinese ship

WASHINGTON, Aug 17: The United States is discussing with China the possibility of a neutral, third party inspecting a Chinese ship that Washington suspects is carrying chemical weapons supplies for Iran, reports AP.

A senior US official said Monday that the administration of President Bill Clinton was trying to reach a compromise on having a third party board the Yennhe, which left Iran waters Friday and is now in an area off Oman in the Gulf.

The United States says the ship's cargo includes chemical weapons precursors for Iran, in violation of an international agreement. It has tried for weeks to arrange for the ship to dock for inspection.

China has denied the charge and has accused the United States of obstructing its commerce with countries in the region.

Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Qin Huasun acknowledged Friday that the vessel was carrying 24 containers scheduled to be off-loaded in Dubai and sent on to Iran. But said they contained "stationery, small metals and machine parts."

8 Vietnamese child hostages freed

PHNOM PENH, Aug 17: Khmer Rouge guerrillas have released eight ethnic Vietnamese child hostages after receiving 700 dollar ransom, UN officials said today, reports Reuter.

The children were kidnapped on Friday from the village of Chnok Tru in Central Kompong Chhnang province, the site of two earlier Khmer Rouge attacks, the officials said.

About 30 guerrillas raided the village, abducted 11 Vietnamese settlers, including the eight children. One woman was later shot and another prisoner released, the officials said. The fate of an 80-year-old woman hostage was unknown.

The children, including a month-old baby, were released on Monday night after the kidnappers received the ransom from the villagers.

"We have a verbal report from the village... the children were released last night (Monday) and a (700 dollar) ransom paid," one UN official told.

On March 24, eight Vietnamese settlers were murdered after 20 Khmer Rouge guerrillas raided the village.

Chnok Tru was attacked a second time on July 8 when the Khmer Rouge killed eight members of two Vietnamese families.

Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978 to oust the Khmer Rouge whose brutal "killing fields" reign of terror led to the death of a million people by execution, starvation or disease.



A Georgian soldier carries a live mine that collected from the bridge over Gumista River, between Abkhazia and Georgia on Monday. Georgian and Abkhazian sides guaranteed on Monday implementation of the plan to disengagement and withdrawal of troops from the conflict zone by midnight August 16. — AFP photo

Nepal-Bhutan talks on refugee crisis shortly

KATHMANDU, Aug 17: A second round of ministerial level talks between Nepal and Bhutan on the more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees here will be held later this month, the Foreign Ministry announced Monday, reports AP.

Home Minister Sher Bahadur Deupa will lead the Nepalese delegation while his Bhutanese counterpart, Dawa Tsering will head his country's team, the announcement said without specifying a date.

A three-member Nepalese committee, headed by Deupa, has already been formed here to be deal with the issues of Bhutanese refugees of Nepalese origin settled in far southeastern Nepal.

The first round of talks was held in the Bhutanese capital of Thimpu on July 16, where it was agreed to hold the second round in Kathmandu.

Well over 100,000 Bhutanese of Nepalese descent who fled their country citing intimidation by government authorities, are sheltered in six camps in the far southeastern Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal.

The camps are supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other Non-Governmental Organizations.

Off the Record

Vacationing president
SPRINGDALE, Arkansas: A vacationing President Clinton returned home to Arkansas on Monday and was welcomed back by a cheering crowd of hundreds. "It's wonderful to be home," he said.



One woman who greeted the president wore a T-shirt reading, "The mice in Little Rock are nothing compared with the rats in DC." Clinton broke into a laugh and said, "I love it, I love that T-shirt."

Most of the well-wishers called him just "Bill." A man implored Clinton, "Get things straightened out, Mr. President." Specifically, the man suggested that Clinton broaden an Oklahoma Democrat who voted against the president's economic plan. "It's a hard thing to do," Clinton replied.

Asked what he planned to do during his two-day stay, Clinton said: "Rest, talk to people, have a good time." He flew here from Tulsa, Okla., where he addressed the National Governors Association.

Clinton is spending two nights at the waterfront home of longtime friends Jim and Diane Blair on Beaver Lake near Springdale in northwestern Arkansas. He plans to return to Washington on Wednesday and then head out the next day for a 11-day stay on Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts.

The president was greeted at the gate of the Blair home with a welcome sign drawn by two youngsters, Jake Knapp, 5, and his sister, Madison, 6.

"Wow," the president said, drawing the children close in for a picture with him. "Isn't that nice. I love that."

Keaton regrets
NEW YORK: Diane Keaton has regrets. The 47-year-old actress director and photographer regrets not making more movies in the years after her Oscar-winning performance in 'Annie Hall' in 1977. And, she wonders whether she should have spent so much time on dramas, reports AP.

She appeared in 'Reds' and 'Shoot the Moon' in 1981 and 'The Little Drummer Girl' and 'Mrs. Soffel' in 1984.

But one thing she doesn't regret is stepping in to star in Woody Allen's newest film 'Manhattan Murder Mystery,' after the filmmaker's highly publicized falling out with Mia Farrow, his longtime leading lady and lover.

Keaton stood by Allen throughout his bitter and unsuccessful custody battle with Farrow, which started after Farrow learned of his affair with her 22-year-old adopted daughter, Soon-Yi Previn.

"I liked Mia. I like Mia," Keaton said in an interview published Sunday in The New York Times. "But my history has always been linked with Woody. He's my friend."

Keaton, who starred in five of Allen's films when they were a couple, said it was easy working with him again.

"He responds to me the way he always responded to me, which is like I'm a complete idiot," she said. "It's like an old marriage or like I'm a kid sister."

Penguins getting fatter
AUCKLAND: Scientists plan to weigh more than 100 penguins in Antarctica to determine if the birds are getting fatter as an indirect result of the Greenhouse Effect, reports AP.

Researchers from New Zealand and the United States National Science Foundation, which operates bases on the frozen continent, will set up weighing scales at three penguin colonies in the Ross Dependency next year.

New Zealand team leader Peter Wilson said Tuesday that the marine food chain around Antarctica appears to be growing in slightly warmer waters from the Greenhouse Effect.

About 100 birds will be tagged with small electronic monitors. They will be weighed over five years on computer controlled platforms each time they waddle to and from the sea over their customary routes.

Wilson said more food has also increased the penguin population. Aerial photographs of the colonies show the number of breeding pairs has increased from 400,000 in 1981 to more than 1 million now.

Manila rules out amnesty for 15 soldiers

MANILA, Aug 17: The Philippine government on Tuesday rejected amnesty or clemency for 15 soldiers jailed for the 1983 assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino, reports AP.

The government ruled out releasing the soldiers as the country prepared to mark the 10th anniversary of the August 21, 1993 murder of the husband of former President Corason Aquino.

"It will not agree that these people be considered as part of the amnesty proclamation," Justice Secretary Franklin Drilon told journalists, adding that "neither are they eligible for executive clemency."

NATO warning of air strike on Serbs remains in effect

WASHINGTON, Aug 17: The reported Bosnian-Serb withdrawal from two strategic mountains near Sarajevo is not sufficient to remove a warning by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of air attacks if the stranglehold on humanitarian aid to the Bosnian capital continues, the State Department says, reports USIS.

Department spokesman Michael McCurry said August 16 the NATO warning remains in effect. He emphasized that the United States is assessing daily the conditions on the ground around Sarajevo and elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "We certainly have not ruled out calling for a meeting of the North Atlantic Council to authorize NATO air strikes," he said.

"The Bosnian-Serbs know what is expected of them" and they "face a determined and resolved NATO alliance as it examines the conditions on the ground in Sarajevo and elsewhere in Bosnia," McCurry said.

The spokesman said the United States understands that the withdrawal was sufficient for the Geneva talks among the Bosnian parties to resume, and "they have resumed."

While the shelling of Sarajevo by Bosnian-Serb forces seems to have lessened, McCurry said that the "strangulation" of the city persists.

"As long as you can't get adequate amounts of relief through... so that those citizens who are in Sarajevo can prepare for the winter and get the type of supplies they need, you still have a condition that amounts to what we would call strangulation. This is why we have put an

emphasis on things like electricity, food and water," he said.

The spokesman noted that there has been "undoubtedly a modest amount of improvement" in the situation around Sarajevo and other safe areas, including "some reports that electricity has been turned on" and that some of the hospitals that had been operating on diesel-generated electricity are now receiving electricity from other power grids. He said the food situation around Tuzla is "somewhat improved" and there are reports that some aid has arrived in Gorazde. "Those are certainly important signs," he said. But "we're looking for a continued improvement over time in the conditions that exist on the ground for those citizens who are trapped in Sarajevo."

The spokesman emphasized that the threat to aid convoys remains very dangerous and that "the overall situation in each of these safe areas remains fairly grim."

He said that much has to be done — and quickly — to stockpile food and other

humanitarian goods needed "to make it through what is promising to be a fairly dismal winter."

Expressing US support for the evacuation of persons from Sarajevo in need of medical attention, the spokesman noted that he United States 100 such persons have come to he United States for treatment and that planning has begun to bring in 100 more. The Defense Department will continue to transport these patients, and private American doctors and medical facilities have offered to treat them, he said.

He applauded the efforts of the US Olympic Committee to bring some Bosnian athletes to the United States for several months of training. Press reports said the Olympic Committee plans to bring 28 athletes and two coaches to the United States.

Victor Jackovitch, the US Ambassador to Bosnia, arrived in Sarajevo August 15 from the Geneva talks, the spokesman said, as part of the US effort "to assemble the most accurate information on conditions on the ground in Sarajevo."

ICRC seeks Israeli permission to visit deportees

GENEVA, Aug 17: The International Committee of the Red Cross has asked the Israeli government for permission to visit 396 Palestinian deportees camping in South Lebanon, an ICRC spokesman said here Monday, reports AP.

"The ICRC wants to make sure that they really do want to return to the Israeli-occupied territories," Rene-Luc Thevoz said referring to a plan announced in Jerusalem Sunday under which the deportees will be repatriated in stages up to December.

Israel had not indicated when it would allow the ICRC visit to proceed, but the Red Cross wanted it to be as soon as possible, Thevoz added.