

18 army officers executed in DPRK

SEOUL, Aug 25: Eighteen army officers, including generals, were executed after a failed coup attempt in North Korea last September, a news report said today, according to AFP.

The National Yonhap news agency quoted an unidentified source as saying in Beijing that the 18 included general-grade commanders of units stationed on the outskirts of Pyongyang.

They planned to occupy the presidential palace and other important government buildings and arrest President Kim Il-Sung and his son and heir apparent Kim Jong-Il by mobilising troops under their command.

But one of the coup planners reportedly betrayed his fellows by alerting the authorities at the last minute, leading to the arrest and execution of those involved.

The informer was in turn shot because he had failed to report the plot earlier.

Yonhap said the source, well informed on North Korean affairs, had heard about the failed coup from a cabinet minister-level North Korean official. The source was seeking to confirm widespread rumours of a coup attempt in Pyongyang, Yonhap said. The Yonhap news came a day after a North Korean defector told a press conference that he had heard a coup attempt failed late last year.

IM Yong-Sun, a first lieutenant of the 583rd corps of the North Korean army, said more than 10 generals, all from the former Soviet Military academy, were arrested and executed.

As a result, the armed forces security bureau set up early this year a new department devoted to watching generals and tapping their telephone lines, IM said.



US President Bill Clinton (far R), First Lady Hillary Clinton (C), US Sen. Edward Kennedy (far L), Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (center L), and other guests before leaving Menemsha harbour for a cruise August 24. Others in the photo are unidentified. — AFP photo.

Clinton, Kennedy families go cruising

MARTHA'S VIENYARD, Massachusetts, Aug 25: President Bill Clinton and his family went cruising aboard a yacht with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis off Martha's vineyard on Tuesday as some 200 on-lookers cheered, reports Reuter.

Members of the Kennedy family joined the luncheon party aboard the yacht Releamar, owned by Maurice Templeman, long-time companion of the late President Kennedy's widow.

Clinton, his wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea were greeted by Templeman and Senator Edward Kennedy as they arrived at Menemsha harbour for a luncheon cruise.

The party included the late President's daughter Caroline and her husband Ed Schlossberg and Vernon Jordan, chief of Clinton's transition team, and his wife Anne.

Armenians hit last Zangelan pocket

MOSCOW, Aug 25: Armenian forces launched an offensive in the Zangelan area of southwestern Azerbaijan, the last pocket in the region still controlled by Azerbaijan forces, Interfax reported today, quoting the Baku Defence Ministry, says AFP.

Armenian forces backed by tanks and helicopters attacked from inside Armenia along a 20-kilometre (12-mile) front in the border area, the Ministry said.

The Armenians, who attacked from the Kafan region, have already advanced five kilometres (three miles) into Azerbaijani territory, the Ministry said.

The Armenian forces also launched parallel attacks from eight villages in the Zangelan region which have been under their control since December 1992, the Ministry added.

Clashes between Armenian and Azeri forces were continuing around two border villages and on the Shukurataz Heights, Baku added.

Armenian military sources in Yerevan contacted by AFP said they were not aware of the reported invasion.

Yerevan has repeatedly denied involvement in the struggle by armed Armenian separatists in the breakaway enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, although the enclave's former chief of Staff, Sergei Sarkisyan, is now Armenian Defence Minister.

Officially only Armenian "volunteers" independent of the Defence Ministry have been involved in the border clashes.

BRRIEFLY

PLO emergency meet today: The emergency meeting of the PLO executive committee called by the PLO leader Yasser Arafat will be held in Tunis today, GNA reports from Amman.

Palestinian sources said the meeting will discuss the resignation of committee member Mahmoud Darwish and the suspension of the membership of Shaifq Al Hout.

15 executed in China: Fifteen people were executed in the Southern Chinese city of Guangzhou for robbery, burglary, assault and murder, the Beijing-funded China News Service (CNS) said Wednesday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The executions were carried out immediately on Tuesday after the court sentenced the 15, CNS said courts in Tanhe district in Guangzhou and in neighbouring Panyu also sentenced more than 20 people to prison for various jail terms, it said.

In a separate report, the agency said Guangzhou courts sentenced 780 people for 'economic crimes' over the past six months, up 4.5 per cent from the same period last year.

Dolphins' deaths provoke protest: The deaths of two female dolphins at a Paris amusement park provoked protest from Brigitte Bardot, who claimed that captive dolphins suffer physical and psychological disorders, AFP reports from Paris.

The animal-rights foundation headed by the former film sex symbol denounced dolphin shows like those put on at Asterix Park north of Paris, where the dolphins died in mid-July.

"The life expectancy of dolphins (about 40 years in the wild) is cut in half by the simple fact of captivity," the Brigitte Bardot Foundation said in a communique.

Human remains found in Laos: US military experts found some suspected human remains during a recent field investigation in Laos into the fates of Americans missing from the Vietnam War, a US official said Wednesday, AP reports from Bangkok.

The experts took the remains with them when they left Laos on August 16 after completing a month-long investigation in Xiang Khoang province with help from Laotian workers, said Lt. Col. David Geraldson.

The remains are being analyzed by the army Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii to determine if they belong to any of the 514 Americans listed as missing in Laos, he said. Also found in the search was US military aircraft wreckage, he said.

Diphtheria claims 100 in Russia: More than 100 people have died in Russia so far this year from diphtheria, a disease that had apparently been eradicated, a senior official said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Moscow.

Anatoly Monisov, deputy chairman of Russia's State Epidemiology Monitoring Commission, told a news conference about 4,000 cases of the infectious disease had been registered in the last eight months.

Officials thought diphtheria had been eradicated by the 1960s. Experts link a health crisis to post-Soviet economic problems which have caused a decline in health and living standards.

6 killed in Manipur fighting: At least six people were killed Wednesday when Indian paramilitary troops fought separatist guerrillas in the remote northeastern state of Manipur, a news agency said, AP reports from New Delhi.

Guerrillas killed two soldiers in an attack on a Central Reserve Police Force in the state capital Imphal, about 2,500 kilometers (1,600 miles) east of New Delhi.

The troops retaliated by opening up with automatic rifles. Four civilians were killed in the cross fire, United News of India said, quoting the Additional Superintendent of Police Chandramani Singh. Six other people were injured.

6 shot dead in Algeria: Algerian security forces shot dead six Muslim fundamentalists in a gunbattle in the capital, the government newspaper El Moudjahid said yesterday, Reuter reports from Algiers.

The men, including a Moroccan, were wanted for a series of crimes including arson and armed robbery and were killed in an operation which continued into the early hours of Tuesday.

HK to strengthen border fence: The government will spend 52.5 million Hong Kong dollars (US 6.7 million dollar) strengthening the fence along the Chinese border to keep out illegal immigrants, police said Monday, AP reports from Hong Kong.

The metal sheets enclosing the wire mesh fence along the 20-mile (32-kilometer) frontier will be doubled in height to four meters (13 feet), making it impossible to cut through the wire, they said.

Lanka postpones local council polls

COLOMBO, Aug 25: Sri Lanka President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga has postponed plans to hold local council polls in the north and east because of renewed fears of Tamil rebel interference, a Tamil politician said today, reports Reuter.

Pararajasingham Joseph, a Tamil parliamentarian from the east, said Wijetunga told a group of government MPs on Tuesday he was postponing the poll, expected in the next few months, until January next year.

"But I think it is unlikely to be held until the Tamil problem is resolved," Joseph said.

When local council elections were last held in 1991, the troubled north and east were excluded because of Tamil separatist unrest that has dragged on since the early 1980s.

The government last week fixed September 3 to 10 as the dates when nominations would be accepted for candidates in three districts in the east and one in the north.

The Independent Island newspaper said the poll had been for October 23 but there was no official confirmation.

At least six Tamil parties active in the region urged a postponement of the grounds that they could not campaign without the Tamil problem being resolved.

Tamil political sources said last week's nominations announcement came as a surprise because the northeast region, where Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas are fighting for independence for minority Tamils, is still considered too fractious for a successful poll.

"There are many reasons why you can't hold elections... the main one being no security for contestants and voters who would be threatened by Tamil rebels," one source said.

He said the recent call for elections may have been made to stave off criticism at a United Nations debate scheduled for last Friday in Geneva on the island's ethnic conflict.

The government's successfully lobbied for the withdrawal of the proposed UN resolution calling for UN intervention in the island's ethnic conflict in which more than 30,000 people from all sides have been killed over the past 10 years.

China admits secret talks with Tibetan govt in exile

BEIJING, Aug 25: China today acknowledged holding secret talks with Tibet's Exiled Independence Movement and said it was prepared to negotiate anything with the Dalai Lama - except the Himalayan territory's independence, reports Reuter.

The official Xinhua news agency confirmed the talks took place, saying they were an internal affair of China.

The secret meetings held in Beijing last month were the first in 10 years between China and the government in exile of the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, whom Beijing accuses of trying to "split the motherland."

Xinhua quoted a Foreign Ministry Spokesman as saying the door of negotiation between Beijing and the Dalai Lama remained wide open - with one important limitation.

"Except for the independence of Tibet, all other questions can be negotiated," the spokesman said. "We hope the Dalai Lama will stop his activities of splitting the motherland and give up his position for Tibetan independence."

The Dalai Lama was quoted by a French newspaper on Tuesday as saying he wanted regular contact with China's ambassador in India in the wake of last month's Beijing talks.

AFP adds: Chairman of the Tibetan autonomous region Gyancain Norbu was recently quoted as saying China would not give up its fight against separatism.

"We must resolutely counter separatism, defend the unity of the country and attack separatist forces," the Tibet daily quoted him as telling three foreign journalists. "Tibet is an inalienable part of China. No one can deny that on historical or legal grounds."

China considers Tibet to have been a part of its territory since the 13th century and says the Chinese army peacefully liberated the region in 1951.



Winnie Mandela, (R) wife of ANC leader Nelson Mandela, confronts an armed South African Police officer as police arrive to collect bodies in Phola Park squatter camp, east of Johannesburg August 24. Three people, including a three-year-old child shot in the head, died during a South African Defence Force (SADF) raid August 23. — AFP photo.

Egyptian to head UN commission on corruption

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 25: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has appointed an Egyptian as head of a new commission to investigate fraud and corruption within the United Nations, a UN spokesman said, reports AFP.

Mohamed Aly Niaz, a former accountant who has carried out auditing duties within the United Nations, will have a staff of 90 people, the spokesman said Tuesday. The world body employs some 13,000 people.

Niaz's appointment, which takes effect on September 1, follows pressure from the United States, which provides 25 per cent of the UN budget and has called for major reforms of the body and its bureaucracy, diplomats said.

Washington owes more than 700 million dollars to the United Nations.

For several years, the US administration has been calling for the creation of an Inspector-General's post in the United Nations.

Jackson ill, postpones performance

BANGKOK, Aug 25: Pop idol Michael Jackson today postponed his second performance here because of illness, police said, reports AFP.

Spokesman for the 34-year-old Jackson could not immediately be reached, and there was no word on the nature of his illness.

Meanwhile, Reuter from Los Angeles said: A private detective said on Tuesday that a criminal investigation targeting Michael Jackson stemmed from a 20 million dollar extortion plot against him, said the pop superstar vowed that he would be cleared of wrong doing.

The probe by the Los Angeles police department was launched after a woman complained that her child had been abused at one of Jackson's homes, local television stations reported.

Calling Jackson the "victim" in the case, Anthony Pellicano, the entertainer's security consultant said he had been "actively engaged in an investigation regarding an extortion attempt."

"A demand for 20 million dollar was made and presented and it was flatly and consistently refused," he told a crowded news conference.

Pellicano, who said Jackson has faced extortion bids before, suggested that the singer's refusal to pay his accusers led to the piling of a bogus criminal complaint and the opening of a police investigation.

Los Angeles police confirmed on Monday that Jackson was the target of a criminal probe but declined to elaborate on the nature of the allegations against him.

Off the Record

Elephants raid Nepalese village to eat rupees

KATHMANDU: Seven elephants recently pulled down a Nepalese villager's house and ate up his 15,000 rupees about 300 US dollars in cash kept in a bag of rice, reports Xinhua.

About 2,000 rupees (about 40 US dollars), were found later in elephant feces in a horticulture zone of an agricultural centre.

The cash recovered in bits and pieces is now at local police station, local press reported yesterday.

During the same day, the elephants also pulled down several other houses, eating up grain kept inside and throwing the nuts and pans. They likewise damaged banana plants, coconut and betel trees.

The local people lit fires and torches and set off firecrackers at that day to drive the pachyderms away, according to the local police.

Princess enters 'magic kingdom' via an underground passage

ORLANDO, Florida: Princess Diana and her two young sons on Tuesday swapped Kennington palace for 'magic kingdom' as they began their holiday at Walt Disney World, reports Reuter.

Disney officials, accustomed to entertaining celebrities, are not divulging the Princess' plans and local police are describing the visit, expected to last about three days, as low-key and private.

Diana and her entourage had the entire upper deck of a commercial British Airways jet to themselves, out of sight of all but a few first class passengers.

On arriving, Diana continued to keep a low profile. She ducked into the Grand Floridian hotel, a posh Victorian-style resort, through a servant's entrance and later on Tuesday entered the vast amusement park's 'magic kingdom' via an underground passage.

Onlookers said they spotted her later on splash mountain, the jungle cruise, and the Thunder Mountain Railway.

She changed her beige-checked travel suit for jeans and a T-shirt, and joined Prince William, 11, and Prince Henry, 8, as they zoomed down splash mountain's flume. She ducked while her sons shouted with excitement.

In addition to a nanny and security personnel, she is travelling with friends identified by the palace press corps as Kate Menzies and Catherine Soames, and her nine-year-old son Harry Soames.

The British press has been full of speculation that the selection of holiday destinations for the young Princesses is part of the "war of the Waleses" between their estranged parents.



Rather convince men to use condoms

NEW DELHI: A panel of MPs flayed the Indian government on Wednesday for concentrating more on women in its birth-control programme rather than convincing men to use condoms for safe sex, reports AFP.

Describing the alleged sexist bias as "ill-conceived," the panel said in a report on population control that untested contraceptives, surgery by unqualified practitioners, illegal sex-determination tests and corruption were hampering the programme.

"Sterilisation has become a women's programme," the report tabled in Parliament Wednesday, said, pointing out that more than 96 per cent of Indians who undergo surgery to prevent birth are women.

Only 3.5 per cent of people opting for sterilisation were men, the report said and urged the government to remove the bias from its birth-control projects. "It should be a people's programme," it added.

"This reflected the ill-conceived bias in the programme. Most of the contraceptives being popularised here are to be used by women."

"A change of attitude of planners must be accomplished, so that equal emphasis is given on the availability of safe methods for both men and women," the panel said, recommending efforts to promote the use of condoms.

Malval pledges to rebuild Haiti's economy

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Aug 25: The man chosen to lead Haiti's transition from military to civilian rule has pledged to do "everything humanly possible" to rebuild a devastated economy and unite a divided society, reports AP.

Robert Malval, a businessman with no government experience, faces a daunting challenge leading the country back to democracy following the 1991 coup that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and brought world sanctions on Haiti.

Malval 50, was Aristide's pick for prime minister. Under a UN mediated peace plan, a world of embargo will be lifted and foreign aid will be increased when Aristide's nominee takes office. The plan also calls for army ruler Lt. Gen.

Tone of US-Cuba relations more amicable than at any time

WASHINGTON, Aug 25: Officials at Cuba's small diplomatic mission here were all smiles a few weeks ago when the State Department issued a warning to Miami-based exiles not to engage in armed attacks against their homeland, reports AP.

The diplomats never were sure about the attitude of Republican administrations toward such illegal activities, and the US warning was viewed as a welcome gesture by Havana's envoys.

Examples of that kind of neighbourliness have been rare over the years, but there is general agreement that the tone of Washington-Havana relations is more amicable now than at any time since the early months of the Carter administration.

As Cuba's economic crisis has deepened with the collapse of its prime benefactor, the Soviet Union, Cuban officials have been especially eager for some sign that Washington wants a more congenial relationship.

But the Clinton administration's less-abrasive tone has not been matched by changes in substance. The centerpiece of US policy toward Cuba continues to be the trade embargo, now more than 30 years old, and President Clinton is showing no interest in lifting it.

The administration has been firm in its insistence that President Fidel Castro scrap his one-party state and move toward a democratic system.

But Elizardo Sanchez, a dissident who was given permission by Cuban authorities to travel abroad last month, said after a visit to Washington that he found US officials "open-minded" about the possibility of a new approach to Cuba.

US officials dispute that statement, but Gillian Gunn, a Cuba expert at Georgetown University, says, "there definitely has been an improvement in tone. Both governments are choosing to emphasize the more courteous aspects of their policy and choosing to de-emphasize the more belligerent aspects."

Some analysts believe the Clinton administration is pursuing this approach to make it more difficult for Castro to blame the United States for the catastrophic economic conditions on the island.

Castro is finding ways to circumvent the embargo, he recently authorized Cubans to deal in dollars for the first time, and has allowed a substantial increase in visits to the island by dollar-carrying exiles. The measures constitute tacit admission by Castro that Cuba is broke.

The magnitude of Cuba's internal problems has had an impact in Washington. Officials are searching for ways to help the Cuban people without bolstering the regime, an approach endorsed by Congress last fall.

The lawmakers tightened the embargo but, at the same time, made possible improved telephone service between the two countries as well as private donations of humanitarian supplies.

As for state-to-state relations, the administration's ability to maneuver is sharply limited by powerful Miami exile groups, especially the Cuban-American National Foundation, which strongly opposes any relaxation of US policies.

But foundation influence seems to be waning; no foundation representatives were invited to a Cuban independence day observance at the White House in May.

The foundation also was outraged recently when the administration invited four Cubans to Miami to testify in a case involving a Cuban pilot who diverted a plane to Florida in December with 52 aboard. The pilot is seen as a hero by many exiles but the Justice Department may indict him on hijacking charges.

There have been other signs of reduced hostility toward Havana as well. US government specialists have been to Cuba to offer advice on containing a mysterious neurological plague that has afflicted thousands this year. The administration also has been less tightfisted about approving requests for visas by Cuban professionals.

The gentler US approach to Cuba partly reflects the change in personnel under the Clinton administration. Several have shown sympathy in the past for a more moderate line toward Cuba, including UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright, Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff and the top Latin American specialist on the National Security Council, Richard Feinberg.

Castro, who recently described Clinton as "a decent man, a man of a peace," has taken steps on a number of other issues of concern to the United States. Last year, he ruled out further Cuban involvement on behalf of revolutionary movements elsewhere and he authorized the release of several high-profile dissidents from prison this year.

That's not nearly enough to suit Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who dismisses notions of a thaw with Cuba. Castro, says Christopher, is "a relic of the past."

US for Russian pullout from Lithuania

WASHINGTON, Aug 25: The United States called Tuesday for withdrawal of Russian troops from Lithuania and resumption of negotiations between the two countries, reports AP.

Lithuania and the two other Baltic states, Estonia and Latvia, have the sovereign right to insist the troops depart, and protecting the rights of minorities should be dealt with separately, a senior administration official said.

Under US law, Russia could lose about 700 million dollar in technical aid if its 2,000 to 2,600 troops remain in Lithuania after October, the official said. But he told The Associated Press the administration had not specifically warned Russia to that effect. "They've known about it for months," he said.