

BRIEFLY

Khmers hold US aid worker: Khmer Rouge guerrillas holding an American aid worker are demanding "millions of dollars" for her release, a government official said Wednesday. AP reports from Phnom Penh.

Melissa Himes, 24, of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, has been detained since last Thursday in a village in Kampot province where she went to try settle a dispute over the drilling of water wells. Three of her Cambodian colleagues in the Christian relief agency Food for the Hungry International are also being held.

Neither the Phnom Penh office of the aid agency nor the US Embassy had heard of such a demand when contacted Wednesday.

Congressman shot in Guatemala: A right-wing Guatemalan congressman was shot and critically wounded Wednesday by an unidentified gunman as he left a restaurant in the capital. AP reports from Guatemala City.

Obdulio Chinchilla Vega, the only deputy of the Revolutionary Party, was hit in chest. He was in critical condition after being operated on in a private hospital, said Dr Arnoldo McDonald.

The attack is the second against Chinchilla in a year. He was gravely injured and lost his left eye last May 18, when attackers sprayed his car with gunfire. One of Chinchilla's bodyguards was killed.

Ghali condoles newsmen's death: UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali deplored Wednesday the killing of AFP correspondent Lissy Schmidt, who was shot dead Sunday in Iraqi Kurdistan. AFP reports from UN.

Boutros-Ghali sent a personal message of condolence to AFP's Managing Director Lionel Fleury, the secretary general's spokesman Joe Sills said.

Ruling party wins Salvador polls: El Salvador's supreme electoral tribunal said Wednesday the ruling Arena Party and its right-wing allies had retained their joint majority in the legislative assembly in elections held last month. Reuters reports from San Salvador.

But former leftist guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) became the second biggest party in the 84-member, single-chamber assembly and also forced Arena into a run-off vote later this month to choose the country's new president, according to final results released by the tribunal.



The UN Secretary-General's special envoy for former Yugoslavia, Yasushi Akashi (L) speaks with Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic in Sarajevo on Wednesday. Akashi on Thursday met Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic in an effort to halt the assault on the mainly Muslim enclave of Gorazde, which has so far killed 64 and wounded 301.

— AFP photo

Gunmen break IRA truce

BELFAST: Apr 7: Protestant gunmen Wednesday night broke the calm of the Irish Republican Army's three-day ceasefire with an attack in its west Belfast heartland, reports AP.

The outlawed Protestant loyalist group the Ulster Freedom Fighters in a message to Belfast news organisations claimed responsibility for the attack at Community Cabs, a taxi depot.

No one was hurt and the IRA ceasefire, launched in the hope of tempting Britain into talks, continued unbroken by any retaliation for the UFF at-

tack into its second day Thursday.

The IRA's political ally Sinn Fein in a statement said the attack on the taxi depot was deliberately sectarian. People dived for cover as three gunmen opened up. Police said they escaped in a hijacked car back to a nearby Protestant neighbourhood.

The attack at the cab depot was the only violent incident in northern Ireland Wednesday, the first day of the IRA ceasefire.

No progress was evident toward extending the IRA truce beyond three days.

Fresh charge against Imelda

MANILA: Apr 7: Former first lady Imelda Marcos was charged Wednesday with embezzling nearly 100 million pesos (3.7 million dollar) in government funds 10 years ago, reports AP.

The charges were the latest against the widow of strongman Ferdinand Marcos. She has been charged in at least 100 other criminal and civil suits in connection with alleged corruption that took place during her husband's 20-year administration.

In September 1993, she was convicted of graft and sentenced to up to 24 years in jail. She is free on bail pending her appeal of the verdict.

Also charged with Imelda, who was then Minister of Human Settlements, were her former deputies Conrado Benitez, Gilbert Dulay, then assistant finance manager of the ministry, and Rafael Zagala, then assistant manager for regional operations.

International

Mahmoud Mestiri returns to Pakistan

UN mission to Kabul fails

ISLAMABAD, Apr 7: The UN special mission led by former Tunisian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Mestiri returned to Pakistan yesterday without achieving any permanent ceasefire during its five-day visit to Kabul, reports Xinhua.

"Till now we got no concrete promise regarding the acceptance for a permanent ceasefire," a report from Kabul quoted Mestiri as saying.

"We got promises and half promises to extend the temporary ceasefire but I cannot say that we succeeded," he said.

The warring factions in Kabul observed a temporary ceasefire during the stay of the mission in Kabul.

Mestiri also told journalists that UN wants to establish a permanent presence in Kabul as soon as possible.

The United Nations has stayed away from playing an active role in Afghanistan since August 1992 and it is now resuming the political role to bring an end to the factional

Balladur's China visit to produce fresh impetus to relations

BEIJING, Apr 7: French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur arrived in Beijing yesterday launching the first official visit to China by a French premier in 16 years, the official news agency Xinhua said. reports AFP.

"The visit is seen here as an important political move which will produce fresh impetus to Sino-French relations," the agency said.

China and France moved in January to normalise their relations after a nearly two-year spat caused by the sale of French Mirage 2000-5 fighters to Taiwan, which China considers a renegade province.

Balladur is accompanied on his four-day trip Foreign Minister Alain Juppe and the Minister for Industry, External Trade and Telecommunications, Gerard Longuet.

Court orders to reinstate Pravda editor-in-chief

MOSCOW, Apr 7: A court has ordered that Viktor Linnik be reinstated as editor-in-chief of the communist daily Pravda two months after he was sacked in a vote of the newspaper's staff, Itar-Tass said today, reports AFP.

The ruling was a setback for Pravda International, the Greek company which is the majority shareholder in the daily, which sought to replace Linnik over his efforts to dilute the firm's stake in the paper.

The court said Wednesday that Linnik must be paid back wages for the two months he stayed away from work and must have all administrative sanctions against him lifted.

20 Thais commit suicide in Japan

TOKYO, Apr 7: More than 20 illegal Thai immigrants in Japan have committed suicide so far this year. 14 of them in March alone, the Mainichi Daily reported today, highlighting an alarming trend, reports AFP.

It cited the case of a 25-year-old man who threw himself under a truck on March 16 after a despairing search for a better life in Japan.

The man, promising his family he would soon return home with "lots of money," left his home in Chieang Rai, northern Thailand, after borrowing 8,500 dollars for the trip, the daily said.

US concern irresponsible: China

BEIJING, Apr 7: China on Thursday rejected as irresponsible US expressions of concern over the detention of dissident Wei Jingsheng and said it should not affect US-China trade relations, reports AP.

Meanwhile, police confined at least one dissident to his home and closely watched others and the relatives of political prisoners.

The close surveillance, like Wei's detention, reflected the Communist leadership's recently heightened fears of social unrest. Authorities apparently worry that dissidents will

fighting in the war-torn country.

Mestiri said this UN mission visit to Kabul was just the first of several planned trips in a programme of countrywide familiarisation.

They live in a maze of trenches that weave through deserted streets, in sandbag bunkers that spit dirt as rockets land nearby and in abandoned buildings ravaged by fighting.

"My gun belonged to my friend Lala Gul. He was martyred," said Khan, who like most warriors in this protracted battle for Kabul, believe they are fighting for Islam, despite the fact that both sides in the conflict say they want an Islamic government.

But neither side believes the other and both sides believe they possess the only blueprint to a true Islamic state.

Got in the middle, Kabul's young fighters cling to the belief that if they die they will become martyrs for their faith.

But for Khan the promise of

belong to President Burhanuddin Rabbani's ragtag army that defends the capital against troops loyal to renegade Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

martyrdom has lost its appeal.

"I know I am not supposed to be afraid, but I don't want to die," he said.

He can't recall a time that he didn't have a rifle at his side and when he joined the Muslim resistance in 1986 at eight years old, he said he wasn't afraid to die.

"I wanted to be a martyr," he said. But then his homeland was occupied by Russian troops and the Moscow-backed communist regime was in power in Kabul.

The Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 and in April 1992 Muslim rebels swept the communists from power in Kabul. But they soon turned their guns on each other.

As Khan spoke rockets whistled overhead and the staccato of gunfire echoed through the abandoned orphanage that just three months ago had been filled with the sounds of hundreds of children.



French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur (2nd R) and Madame Balladur are greeted with flowers from a People's Liberation Army officer at Beijing old airport on Thursday.

Aristide to cancel '81 accord with US

WASHINGTON, Apr 7: Exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide is cancelling a 1981 US-Haitian refugee agreement on grounds the US policy of repatriating all boat people from the Caribbean nation violates the accord, reports AP.

Aristide disclosed his decision in a letter to President Clinton, who has retained the Bush administration's policy of sending back all Haitian refugees — including those trying to escape political persecution.

Aristide called the US policy "a perversion of democracy." He said termination of the agreement becomes effective in six months, consistent with the language in the accord allowing that period of time for either country to re-nounce it.

The State Department had no immediate comment on the letter Wednesday.

The US Coast Guard has been repatriating Haitian boat people since May 1992 to discourage Haitians from fleeing and thus avoid mass loss of life.

on the high seas between Haiti and Florida.

The administration has sought to accommodate Haitians who face persecution by permitting them to apply for refugee status at US consular offices in the country.

In the 1981 agreement, the United States pledged not to return bona fide refugees to Haiti.

Aristide's letter said, "the very basis of US refugee policy toward Haitians has rested upon a premise that Haitians are not fleeing persecution." Taking into account the brutality of Haiti's military rulers, Aristide said such an assertion "is no less than incredible."

Copies of the letter were made available to several news organisations Tuesday night.

On Wednesday, Aristide's lawyer Michael Barnes confirmed the letter had been sent.

Barnes also disclosed that Aristide has notified the administration that he cannot accept the latest US plan for reinstating the deposed president.

Off the Record

Colosio anticipated death in love poem

MEXICO CITY: Slain Mexican presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio appeared to anticipate his own death in a love poem to his wife written just hours before his assassination last month and published Wednesday by the Mexico City newspaper Reforma, reports Reuter.

Colosio wrote the 20-line poem on a plane on his way to the US-Mexican border city of Tijuana where he was killed March 23, Reforma said.

The poem, entitled "think of me," is written as though the author were already dead.

"If you love me, do not cry," it reads.

"If you knew the unfathomable mystery of the heaven where I find myself... you would never cry for me."

"We loved each other eternally in life but everything then was fleeting and limited."

"Think of this marvellous place where there is no death and where I am near the inexhaustible source of happiness and love."

"If you truly love me cry no more for me."

"I am at peace."

Reforma said the existence of Colosio's poem to his wife Diana Laura was revealed by a niece of Colosio. A Reforma journalist confirmed to Reuters the poem was written by Colosio but would give no other details.

Zhirinovsky a clinical case'

PARIS: Former Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi was quoted on Wednesday as saying that ultra-nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky was "a clinical case" but could end up as president of Russia, reports Reuter.

In an interview with the French weekly Le Evenement Du Jeudi, Rutskoi said he had never met Zhirinovsky,

whose far-right Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) won more votes than any other party in last December's parliamentary elections.

"But I consider he is above all a clinical case. You only have to listen to his statements," Rutskoi said. "He is probably concerned by Russia's fate but I can't take him seriously as a politician."

Foreign Secretary Najimuddin Sheikh would lead Pakistan's delegation at talks between the two sides, said the spokesman.

The Prime Minister would host a dinner in honour of the US' Deputy Secretary of State. The Foreign Minister would host lunch in honour of Strobe Talbot.



Because they wanted to have some fun

LONDON: Two six-year-old boys caught virtually demolishing a neighbour's house said they were copying television show, British newspapers reported Thursday, says Reuter.

The boys said they smashed glassware, tore up furniture and hurled television equipment to the floor because "we wanted to have some fun".

They said they were copying a television show in which children were encouraged to search frantically through model houses looking for prizes.

"They thought it looked like such fun on TV they would try it out for real," Lynda Dishman, mother of one of the two cousins, told newspapers.

The rampage through the house in Hampshire, west of London, caused a stir in Britain where the issue of criminality among the young was highlighted by the murder of a toddler by two 10-year-olds last year.

Police were quoted as saying they were powerless to charge the boys with burglary or criminal damage because they were under 10, the legal age of criminal responsibility.

Row over forming new govt in Italy continues

ROME, Apr 7: A top official of Italy's Northern League has offered a solution to a row that threatens to delay the formation of a new government and could even make fresh general elections necessary, reports Reuter.

Francesco Speroni, the Federalist League's leader in the Senate (upper house), said on Wednesday the next prime minister should be a non-party figure who would start moving Italy towards a federal structure.

The official told reporters tycoon Silvio Berlusconi could take over the job later.

"The League strongly advises him not to be the next prime minister but to wait until federal reform is underway and then, after the summer, he could very well do the job," he said.

Berlusconi's Forza Italia Party has threatened to force new polls if League leader Umberto Bossi continues to

block talks on forming a new government after last week's elections.

Berlusconi teamed up with the League and the Neo-Fascist Democratic Alliance in a right-wing Freedom Alliance which won an overall majority in the Chamber of Deputies (lower house).

The electoral alliance unravelled this week when Berlusconi broke off talks with Bossi after the League leader delivered ultimatums and vetoed the media magnate as prime minister.

The fiery Bossi, who has called the tycoon "Berluska" in their war of words, say Berlusconi would face conflicts of interest everyday if he were prime minister.

The League's Speroni said Berlusconi should put his business empire into trust in the coming months to ensure it did not clash with his responsibilities as prime minister.

