

BRIEFLY

Israeli shells kill 6 Lebanese: At least six civilians were killed when shells were fired from Israel's self-declared security zone in southern Lebanon on residential districts of the city of Sidon, police said, AFP reports from Sidon.

It was the first time that residential areas of Sidon, the main city in South Lebanon, have come under attack for several years.

30 Red Cross men killed in Rwanda: At least 30 Rwandan Red Cross workers have been killed in current civil unrest, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Geneva.

It is the largest ever single loss of Red Cross lives in the history of the federation and there are fears the death toll will rise, said the organisation, which groups together 161 national societies worldwide.

Taiwan to buy 200 US Patriots: Taiwan's army will purchase 200 improved-version US Patriot missiles for deployment in northern Taiwan against possible enemy missile or air strikes. The United Daily News reported on Thursday. AFP reports from Taipei.

The army would pay 10 billion Taiwan dollars (\$377 million US dollar) for the defence system, said the paper. Citing unidentified military sources.

Taiwan has bought 150 improved-version A and B models of the F-16 fighter jets from the United States at a cost of 5.4 billion US dollars. Delivery of the first plane is expected in 1996.

Pakistan to repair Sikh temples: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Thursday ordered repair and renovation of Sikh temples in Pakistan, an official statement said, AFP reports from Islamabad.

Bhutto has sanctioned five million rupees (165,000 dollars), directing the religious and Minority Affairs Ministry to undertake immediately the maintenance and upkeep of Sikh temples in the country.

Pakistan houses the birthplace of the Sikh religion's founder Guru Nanak and several other places sacred for the community. The announcement coincided with the visit of some 3,000 Sikh pilgrims from India for their Besakhi festival.

Abdel-Rahman needs heart surgery: Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, charged in the alleged conspiracy to blow up the United Nations and other landmarks, needs heart surgery to clear a blockage in his arteries, associates said Thursday. Reuter reports from New York.

But the blind, 55-year-old cleric, has refused to consider the operation, his associates said. Abdel-Rahman, who suffers from diabetes and asthma, has experienced chest pains and undergone extensive testing at New York's Bellevue Hospital, said Ron Kuby, a lawyer for another defendant in the case.

"He has a 60 per cent blockage of his right artery and angioplasty surgery has been recommended to open up the arteries," Kuby told Reuters.

UFF kills Belfast woman: The Ulster Freedom Fighters, a Protestant-based paramilitary group, said Friday its gunmen killed a 33-year-old Belfast woman, AP reports from Belfast.

Gunmen threw a brick through a window at Theresa Clinton's house late Thursday night. As she moved to the window the gunmen sprayed the house with gunfire, police said.

Her husband, James, and their two daughters, who were upstairs at the time, were not harmed. The Ulster Freedom Fighters said their target was Clinton, who is a member of Sinn Féin, the legal, political party which supports the Irish Republican Army.

Int'l mediation in South African crisis collapses

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 15: A foreign peace mission to lift the threat of violence from South Africa's first all-race elections collapsed on Thursday before even getting off the ground, reports Reuter.

"The fact that it has failed fills me with sadness," former British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington told reporters as he, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and five fellow mediators cut short their mission.

ANC chief negotiator Cyril Ramaphosa predicted a surge in violence in the KwaZulu-Natal Zulu heartland, power-base of Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi who is boycotting the April 26-28 elections.

"We are aware of the dangers lurking behind. We are aware of the threat being made by (Inkatha) to disrupt the election in Natal," he told reporters.

Buthelezi, asked if he feared increased violence, told a news conference: "the catastrophe is there, anyone with eyes can see it."

But Inkatha negotiator Ben Ngubane said there was no

question of his party, which wants virtual self-rule in the new South Africa, taking up arms to try to win its objectives.

"The political future of Inkatha does not depend on participating in the election. It is our democratic right to stay out of the election and we believe we can still be a political force," he told reporters.

Ramaphosa, whose party is tipped to win the election, said, security forces faced an enormous task in KwaZulu-Natal where 213 people have been killed in political unrest since the March 31 start of a state of emergency there.

Political analysts said more troops would have to be sent to the region to ensure voting could go ahead there in relative peace.

The South African defence force said it had cancelled all training courses to bring units up to full strength. "It is unusual in a sense, most unusual, but it is because of the unusual times," said spokesman commandant Bria Du Toit.

The South African commercial rand dived to a fresh low

of 3.6465 to the dollar in frantic early afternoon dealings on news of the mission failure. It later recovered explorer dollar sales.

The mediation had been due to begin on Wednesday, but was aborted after Buthelezi refused to agree to mediation terms specifying there could be no compromise on poll dates. Both the ANC and the government have ruled out any delay.

Carrington, who helped negotiate white-rule Rhodesia's transition to independent Zimbabwe in 1980, told reporters in Johannesburg.

"The difference between the parties reflected many years of negotiation. There have been efforts to bridge their differences. This is not a time to blame anyone."

Inkatha's Ngubane had no doubt about who was to blame. "Both the government and the ANC have negotiated in very, very, bad, bad faith," he told reporters.

Both Carrington and Kissinger said their mission had been frustrated by the failure of the ANC, Inkatha and the government to agree terms of

reference for their mission.

An emotional Kissinger said the mediators, "dropped everything in order to contribute to progress towards a non-racial, non-sexist ... society in South Africa."

Asked whether the election date impasse scuttled the process, Kissinger said, "our group was unanimous that at no stage and under no circumstances would we involve ourselves with the question of the election date. That date is for South Africans themselves to decide ... we leave it to the politicians."

Buthelezi, who wants a federal rather than a unitary South Africa, said earlier he was still seeking ways of returning to the election process. "An all-inclusive settlement is needed in this country," he told state television.

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Dalai Lama urges US to use economic pressure on China

HONOLULU, Apr 15: The Dalai Lama urged the United States on Thursday to use economic pressure to encourage China to make improvements in human rights, reports AP.

Backing down to the Chinese government would discourage intellectuals and students who "eventually will bring democracy to China," the exiled leader of Tibet told reporters after addressing the Hawaiian Legislature.

"The world community has the moral obligation to give every encouragement to this group of people," he said.

The Clinton administration has been pushing China to make progress on human rights as a condition for renewing China's favourable trade status.

The Dalai Lama, who fled Tibet in 1959 during a failed revolution against the Chinese communists, said preservation of Tibetan culture is more important than political independence from China.

"In my own case, Tibet is an independent nation, there is no doubt. We have our own culture, heritage, language and customs and the race is different," he said.

"However, my main consideration is preserving Tibetan culture. I consider the preservation of culture more important than political independence."

In his address to lawmakers, the Dalai Lama praised the harmony Hawaii has within its cultural diversity.

"It is my hope and prayer that the spirit of this harmony could be extended and enjoyed by other parts of the world," he said.

Later, the Dalai Lama and his entourage went to the grounds of Iolani Palace, home of Hawaii's deposed monarchy, where he and Hawaiian community leaders shared gifts.

The Dalai Lama, winner of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, arrived here Thursday for a three-day visit to open a tour of the United States that will also take him to California, Kentucky, New York and Massachusetts.

He was scheduled to speak during a day-long symposium Friday, and has two talks scheduled on Saturday. A morning session will focus on world peace, and an evening talk will focus on non-violence.

Off the Record

Zhirinovsky's cap stolen?

STRASBOURG (France): Russian ultra-nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky complained on Thursday his cap was stolen during a visit to France and advised the thief not to sell it — yet, reports Reuter.

Zhirinovsky left for home on Thursday after a trip to the council of Europe in Strasbourg marked by an outburst against NATO, a clash with Jewish students and a warning from France to avoid inflammatory statements or face expulsion.

"My cap was stolen in the cloakroom which was being guarded during the reception organised by the council's general secretariat on Wednesday evening," Zhirinovsky said in an official protest released by the Russian delegation attending the council's parliamentary assembly.

The theft shed some light on "the morality of European deputies," he said.

"I can advise the man who stole it not to sell it straight away because the price of my hats will increase enormously in the near future," said Zhirinovsky, who wants to be president.



Female condoms allowed in US

WASHINGTON: Female condoms will start appearing in American drug stores this summer after the administration acted Thursday to allow an American company to ship them into the country, reports AP.

The Food and Drug Administration notified Wisconsin Pharmaceutical, which makes the Reality female condom, that it had approved the export of the product from a London plant, said company spokeswoman Holly Birnbaum Sherman.

The Reality female condom was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in May 1993. It is currently available only at some family planning clinics and AIDS treatment centres, mostly on the East and West coasts.

It will retail for about 2.50 dollars per condom, packaged three to a box, wrapped and prelubricated in individual packets, with additional lubricant provided.

The Reality condom will be available in August, Sherman said.

Sherman said while Reality acts as a contraceptive it is designed to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted diseases. The condom made of a thin plastic called polyurethane, covers the cervix lines the vaginal canal and partially extends over the labia.

The high capacity Chartex International plant in London manufactures the condoms and has been supplying European and other countries for the past two years. Wisconsin Pharmaceutical, which has sold roughly 80,000 condoms at reduced price to 400 health and family planning clinics since September 1993, manufactured the condoms at a small production plant in Jackson, Wis.

A few drinks over dinner can help prevent heart attacks

LONDON: Dutch researchers reported yesterday they had found more evidence that a few drinks over dinner can help prevent heart attacks in healthy people, reports Reuter.

The researchers, working at the organisation for applied scientific research at Zeist in the Netherlands, set out to confirm the link found in earlier studies between moderate alcohol consumption and lowered chances of heart disease.

"Eight healthy middle-aged men (45-55 years) participated in this study. They were used to moderate alcohol consumption (one to four glasses a day) and a western lifestyle and diet and had no family history of alcoholism," they wrote in the British medical journal.

"On the four study days (either mineral water or 40 grams (1.4 ounces) of alcohol in the form of beer, wine or spirits was consumed at dinner early in the evening."

They found the men who drank alcohol had better levels of substances that prevent blood from clotting for several hours afterwards than those who drank water.

ROK drops exchange of envoys with DPRK

SEOUL, Apr 15: Seeking to break a tense standoff with its rival to the North, South Korea said Friday it would no longer press North Korea to exchange envoys as a precondition for further talks, reports AP.

The envoy swap, along with full nuclear inspections, has been a key precondition for high-level talks between the United States and North Korea on improving bilateral ties and resolving the dispute over the North's suspected nuclear weapons development programme.

While showing keen interest in improving ties with the

China condemns Commons' body report on HK

HONG KONG, Apr 15: China has attacked a British parliamentary committee report on Hong Kong which backed London's uncompromising approach toward China, reports Reuter.

The Hong Kong branch of Xinhua news agency, the de facto Chinese consulate in the colony, said in a statement that the report deliberately confused right and wrong by supporting Governor Chris Patten's democratic reform plans for Hong Kong.

"The report has made people realise more how some old colonialists try to make use of any hence to extend their colonial rule in Hong Kong," said the Xinhua statement.

United States, the hard-line communist state has refused to exchange envoys, arguing that its capitalist rival, Seoul, has no right to meddle in the nuclear dispute.

Seoul officials said the move to drop the demand for an envoy exchange would put more pressure on Pyongyang to clear suspicions over its nuclear programme which it insists is peaceful, by opening all of its nuclear facilities to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"North Korea's attitude clearly shows that it has no interest in exchange envoys," Unification Minister Lee Yungduk said after a meeting of security-related Cabinet officials.

Inter-Korea dialogue broke down last month when North Korean delegates walked out of a crucial border meeting after threatening war and declaring that Seoul could turn into "a sea of fire."

Lee said his Seoul government would continue to try to resolve the problem through dialogue.

Now that the envoy swap has been dropped as a precondition, the North must accept fuller IAEA inspections as soon as possible, Lee said.

The South Korean decision came hours before Robert Gallucci, assistant US secretary of state for political and military affairs, was to arrive from Beijing, for consultations on the Korean nuclear crisis. China is the North's only remaining Communist ally.

Arab, Israeli officials open confce on water-sharing rights tomorrow

ABU DHABI, Apr 15: Officials from Israel, its Arab foes and other regional countries are to open a conference in the Gulf on Sunday to discuss water-sharing rights seen as vital for stability in the volatile area, reports AFP.

The conference in the Omani capital is part of multi-lateral negotiations launched after the 1992 Madrid peace conference to hammer out accords on the environment, water, arms control and other issues.

The Arab League has accused Israel of boosting its supplies by pumping up valuable water from the occupied territories as well as South Lebanon.

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin will head his country's delegation at the talks, the first to be held in the Gulf.

He will be the first Israeli official to come to the oil-rich region ahead of another meeting on arms control to take place in Qatar early next month.

"The talks in Muscat are as important as other peace negotiations," said a Gulf Arab official, who asked not to be named.

Without an agreement on water in the region, any peace settlement remains fragile.

Arab states suffer from a serious water shortage and the problems could worsen if available resources are not exploited in cooperation with

countries in the region including Turkey.

A recent Arab League report estimated the Arab states could only meet 56 per cent of their current water needs.

Population growth is expected to widen the gap to a shortfall of 155 billion cubic metres (5.16 trillion cubic feet) by 2000 and to 259 billion metres (8.63 trillion cubic feet) by 2030.

The growing population and a lack of technology to exploit available resources have pushed down per capita share of water in the Arab region to 1,750 cubic metres (58,333 cubic feet) compared with a world average of 13,900 cubic metres (63,000 cubic feet).

There are an estimated 14.3 million square kilometers of Arab water resources based in the Nile, Euphrates and Tigris. But the three rivers flow from outside the Arab region.

"Water has become one of the main sources of conflicts that threaten the stability and future of the region," an Arab League official said recently.

The issue has also become an important paper on the table of political and economic negotiations in the Middle East.

"The Muscat meeting is the fifth on water. The fourth round was held in Beijing last October where officials reported progress after the signing of the September 13 autonomy accord between Israel and the PLO.

The Beijing talks covered projects such as creating a data bank on water in the region and digging channels to link the Dead Sea with the Mediterranean.

But talks on Palestinian rights to water have bogged down.

After another influential member of the Clean Government Party expressed a desire to get on with the selection process.

"We can't be fussing about this forever," said Yuichi Ichikawa, the party's secretary-general.

Hosokawa's eight-bloc coalition government united last summer to oust the corruption-plagued Liberal Democrats from power for the first time in 38 years. Hosokawa won passage of political reforms but was stymied by disputes over other policies. He announced his resignation over scandals involving his personal

port behind Watanabe, possibly scuttling efforts to keep the shaky alliance together in the wake of Hosokawa's resignation.

"I read a book recently published by Watanabe. I don't think there is much difference between his thinking and ours," Clean Government Party Chairman Koshiro Ishida told reporters Friday.

"Watanabe is one of the few leading politicians who state their opinions clearly," said Ishida, a member of Hosokawa's Cabinet as head of the Management and Coordination Agency.

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'Deng is very healthy'

BEIJING, Apr 15: China's 89-year-old paramount leader Deng Xiaoping is very healthy and still pays close attention to the country's development, his daughter Deng Nan told a news conference today, reports Reuter.

"We are used to all sorts of rumours about his health. We refer to them as a joke," Deng told reporters gathered to hear her speak in her role as Vice Chairman of the State Science and Technology Commission.

"I answer (these rumours) the same way I did during the National People's Congress March — he is very healthy."

Search for Hosokawa's successor threatens ruling coalition

TOKYO, Apr 15: The week-long search for a successor to Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa took another sharp turn Friday, with leaders of a key governing coalition party suggesting they might throw their support behind an opposition politician, reports AP.

The protracted jockeying for Hosokawa's post following his sudden resignation announcement last Friday is paralysing Japanese politics as lawmakers return to their traditional practice of back-room wheeling and dealing.

On-again, off-again candidate Michio Watanabe, a former foreign minister and leader of the third largest faction in the opposition Liberal Democratic Party, indicated Friday that he may leave the party to make a bid for Hosokawa's post.

"Watanabe still has a strong desire to run for the prime minister's post," said an aide in Watanabe's office. Leaving the party, "might be one of the options," the aide said.

Watanabe met last Friday with his key conservative rival for the post, LDP President Yoshiro Kono, but there was no immediate word on the outcome.

In another sign of fracturing in the opposition party, five

Liberal Democrats said Friday they were quitting the party because the LDP was "unable to offer a clear vision of where it wanted to lead Japan."

The five, who will act as independents for the time being, said they hoped to act as a catalyst for shaking up the political structure. They seemed likely to seek an alliance with the ruling coalition, and possibly give their support to a bid by Watanabe for the premier ship.

Meanwhile, leaders of the Clean Government Party (Komeito), a key governing coalition member, indicated they might throw their sup-

port behind Watanabe, possibly scuttling efforts to keep the shaky alliance together in the wake of Hosokawa's resignation.

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CIS to set up jt security body

LONDON, Apr 15: Defence ministers from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on Thursday signed agreements to establish a joint security body, Moscow Ostankino television reported in a broadcast monitored by the BBC, reports AP.

Opening their meeting in Moscow, Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev said he believed the CIS would soon have a joint armed force.

The television said the first step was taken Thursday with the initialing of rule and procedures for a joint security council and documents regulating the work of its secretariat.

Earlier this week, the coalition reportedly agreed in principle to select Foreign Minister Tautum Hata, another of Ozawa's allies, as the new prime minister. But that decision was delayed by internal bickering.

The impasse over who will succeed Hosokawa is less about policy than about personalities. Hosokawa's resignation brought to the surface antagonisms between supporters and opponents of conservative power broker Ichiro Ozawa. The Clean Government Party is key among Ozawa's allies.

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