

Flash flood in Pakistan: 22 die

ISLAMABAD, July 4: At least 22 people have been killed by torrential rains that washed away hundreds of mud houses and flooded the main streets of several cities, officials and newspapers said Monday, reports AP.

Many parts of the country were suffering water shortages and water rationing was in effect in several cities, including

Former Sudanese PM released

KHARTOUM, July 4: The Sudanese authorities have released former Prime Minister Sadeq Al-Mahdi after almost two weeks in detention in connection with a coup plot, reports Reuters.

The state-run Sudan News Agency (SUNA), reporting his release today, quoted opposition leader Mahdi as saying he was not involved in any conspiracy to overthrow the government.

Mahdi, 57, said he thought the coup plot was a fabrication of the government until he heard the recorded confessions of two arrested aides, SUNA said.

Mahdi, overthrown in 1989 by current head of state Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir, was detained on June 20. He was accused of plotting to assassinate some prominent political figures, blow up vital installations in Khartoum and create insecurity in Africa's largest country.

Three aides, retired Brigadier Abdel Rahman Farah, Dr. Hamad Bagadi and Saif Al-Din Saeed, who all belonged to Mahdi's Umma Party, were detained in May this year.

They too were accused of involvement in the conspiracy. A neighbouring country was allegedly involved in the plot. The authorities did not name the country but it is thought to be Egypt.

the capital of Islamabad. But as the first heavy rains of the monsoon season hit Sunday, the inadequate drainage systems were overwhelmed.

The downpour also disrupted the telephone system and electricity supply in Islamabad and the southern port city of Karachi.

Planes, trains and most other transportation was disrupted. Thousands of people in low-lying areas were forced to flee their homes, and others sought shelter on the roof of their homes until the waters receded several hours later.

The water was waist-high in many streets in Karachi as well as Rawalpindi, which is adjacent to Islamabad.

At least seven people were killed and 35 hurt in the Islamabad-Rawalpindi area which received more than seven inches (190 millimetres) of rain Sunday, several newspapers reported.

Five of the victims were swept away by rushing water in Rawalpindi and two were killed when their car was submerged in stream near Islamabad. Hundreds of mud houses collapsed in low-lying areas near Rawalpindi.

In Karachi, at least four deaths were attributed to the heavy rains, including one person who was electrocuted and another who died when a partially completed building collapsed on him.

Also, five people were killed in the southern town of Sukkur and six died in the northern town of Chitral, according to Dawn, an English-language daily.

The heavy rains, however, solved the water crisis in Islamabad and other cities. The Stimly Dam, the main source of water for Islamabad residents, rose 11 feet (3.3 meters) on Sunday, officials said.

Geneva meet endorses peace plan on Bosnia today

SARAJEVO, July 4: International mediators will try to persuade Bosnia's warring factions this week to accept a peace plan that has already come under heavy criticism from Serb and Muslim leaders, reports Reuters.

Foreign ministers from the so-called "contact group" of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States meet in Geneva on Tuesday to endorse the plan, it will be presented to the warring parties on a take-it-or-leave-it basis at a parallel meeting.

Fighting between Serb forces and the mostly Muslim Bosnian army slowed in north central Bosnia as diplomats from the West and Russia prepared to unveil a peace map in Geneva aimed at halting the war.

The mediators regard the

peace plan, which calls for an ethnic partition of Bosnia as the last chance to end the conflict in the former Yugoslav republic.

But UN official and diplomats fear that the two sides will reject the deal and choose to fight on indefinitely.

"There is always a third option between war and peace which is to muddle along and sort of standstill lieutenant general Sir Michael Rose, the commander of UN forces in Bosnia told reporters last week.

"The problem is that in a conflict like this standing still is really going backward. The peace plan drawn up by negotiators from Europe, the United States and Russia, awards 51 per cent of Bosnia to the Muslim-Croat

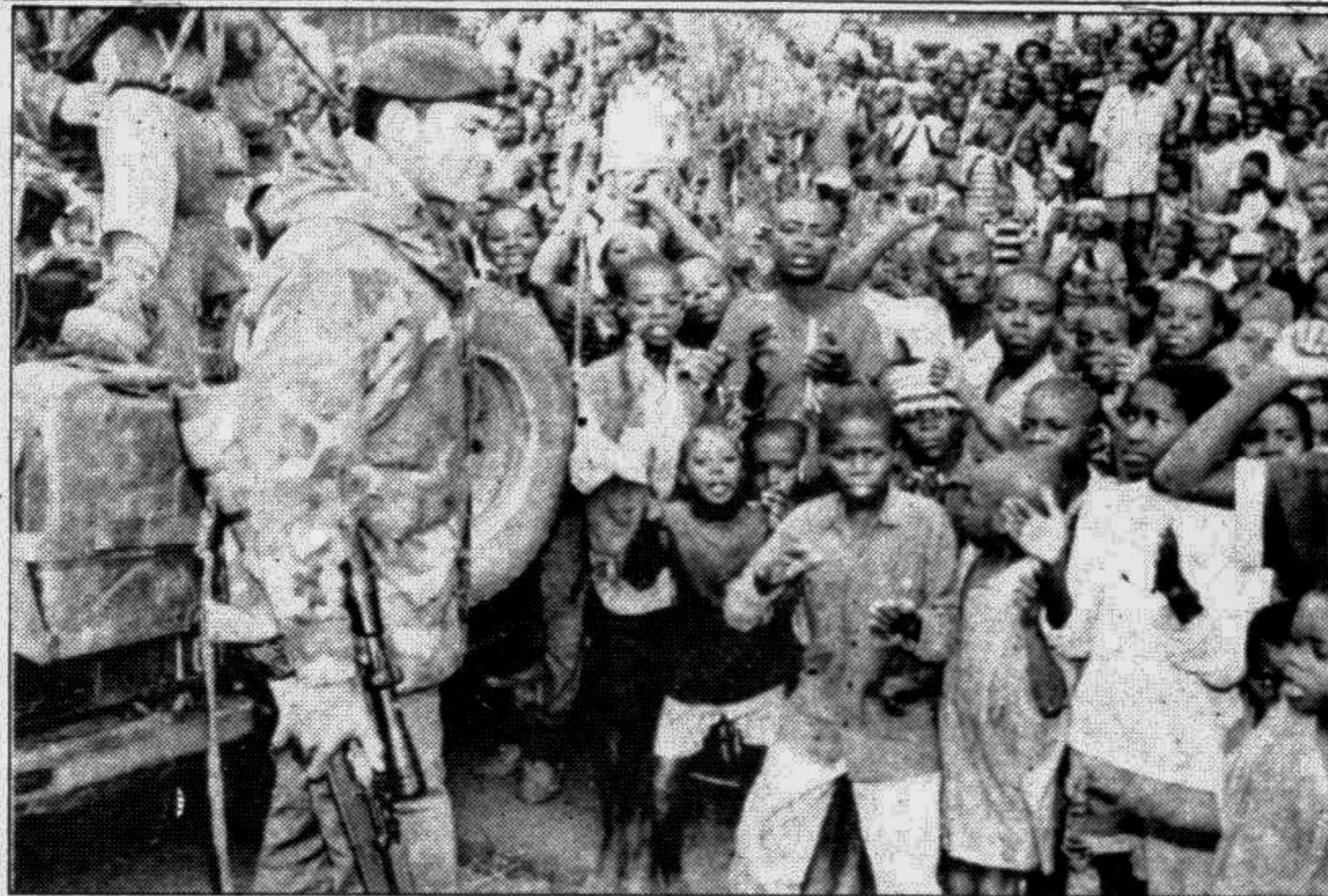
Federation and the rest to the Bosnian Serbs.

The Serbs, who control about 70 per cent of the country after more than two years of war, say it requires them to hand over too much territory.

The Muslim-Croat alliance says its share would be so small to repatriate refugees expelled by Serbs earlier in the war.

France and Britain, which provide the bulk of the UN peacekeeping force in Bosnia have threatened to withdraw or reduce their contribution of the peace plan is rejected.

But neither the Serbs nor the Muslims have given any real indication that they are ready to compromise in the interests of peace. Fighting has continued despite a month-long truce which the United Nations hopes to renew when it expires on July 9.



Hutu refugees greet French Marines arriving in a camp four kilometers outside Butare July 3 as Rwandan rebels clashed with French forces on the outskirts of the city for the first time in the 10-day-old Operation Turquoise. — AFP photo

Turkish diplomat shot dead in Athens

ATHENS, July 4: A Turkish diplomat died in hospital after being shot and wounded by gunmen in Athens today, a hospital spokesman said, reports Reuters.

The spokesman said Turkish Counsellor Omer Haluk Sipahioğlu had lost a great deal of blood after being shot five or six times by gunmen when he left his home for work.

In Ankara the Turkish Foreign Ministry said the diplomat was Omer Haluk Sipahioğlu, an embassy counsellor. He was rushed to hospital and was in the operating theatre.

"He has been wounded and is in hospital, but is not in critical condition," Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Ferhat Ataman said.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. The leftist November 17 guerrilla group shot and killed the Turkish press attaché in October 1991 and badly wounded the Turkish consul with a bomb blast in October of the same year.

November 17 said it carried out the attacks because of Turkey's "expansionist policies" and efforts to permanently divide the eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus.

Ankara has also accused Greece in recent months of aiding Kurdish rebels, which are fighting for independence from Turkey.

Mitterrand in South Africa

CAPE TOWN, July 4: French President Francois Mitterrand was greeted by President Nelson Mandela when he arrived in South Africa today for a two-day visit aimed at cementing ties between the two countries, reports AFP.

Mitterrand, the first western head of state to visit since Mandela's May 10 inauguration as South Africa's first black president, was scheduled to address parliament later today, as well as hold meetings with Mandela and other government leaders.

A military guard of honour and 21-gun salute also greeted Mitterrand as he stepped off his Boeing-747 jet at Cape Town Airport at 9.09 am.

Mitterrand and Mandela inspected the guard of honour before departing.

French diplomats and businessmen have expressed the hope that Mitterrand's visit will boost economic relations between the two countries.

WHO confce on leprosy opens in Hanoi

HANOI, July 4: Delegates from 29 African, Asian and Latin American countries gathered here today for an international conference on leprosy, disease which the World Health Organisation hopes will be eliminated by 2000, reports AFP.

It was opened by WHO director Hiroshi Nakajima of Japan.

Leprosy currently afflicts about 2.4 million people throughout the world compared with 20 million two decades ago. The reduction is due to the development in the early 1980s of effective chemotherapy treatment.

"Although leprosy is no longer a problem in the developed countries, it is still a major public health problem in almost 80 countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America," said Nakajima.

Six countries — India, Brazil, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nigeria — account for 85 per cent of all leprosy cases.

The conference scheduled to last four days will issue a "Hanoi declaration on the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem" which it is hoped will be achieved in 2000.

Who estimates about 150 million dollars will be needed to achieve this.

Japan's Sasakawa Health Foundation, a joint organiser of the conference, announced it would contribute 50 million US dollars to the programme.

BRIEFLY

Huge drugs seized in Pakistan :

Pakistani security forces seized 7.5 tonnes of opium and 20 kilos (40 pounds) of heroin in a raid on a drug dump, officials said Sunday, AFP reports from Peshwar.

The authorities received a report from an informer that a huge drug consignment had been piled up in Ali Masjid town in the tribal Khyber Agency on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

The drugs were dumped in the area for shipment abroad via neighbouring India. A raid organised late Saturday led to the seizure of the drugs as well as a large quantity of chemicals needed to convert opium into heroin.

2 Israeli soldiers electrocuted :

Two Israeli soldiers were electrocuted and three were hurt in an accident while they were serving in Southern Lebanon, the army said yesterday, Reuters reports from Jerusalem.

It said one soldier, standing on an armoured personnel carrier, was killed when he came in contact with a high-tension electric wire.

His comrade was killed and the others hurt trying to rescue him, the army said. Israel radio said the dead men were both Corporals, aged 18 and 19. The accident occurred in the eastern sector of Israel's self-declared South Lebanon security zone.

Bishop Marshall dies in US :

Bishop John A. Marshall, an outspoken opponent of abortion who led the Roman Catholic diocese in Springfield for two years, died Sunday of cancer. He was 66, AP reports from Springfield.

In April, the bishop told parishioners he was suffering from cancer, but he continued his administrative duties until June 7.

Marshall took over as head of the 320,000-member Diocese of Springfield in February 1992. Before coming to Springfield he was bishop for 20 years in Burlington, Vt, where he gained a reputation as a vocal opponent of abortion.

4 Turks hurt in blast in Germany :

Four Turks were hurt, one seriously, when two fire bombs exploded outside a Turkish cultural centre in this northern port city overnight, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Hamburg.

The devices were lobbed at the building in the Sankt Pauli district about half an hour after midnight. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The seriously injured person was hospitalised but not in critical condition.

US plane crash death toll 37 :

A jet crash that killed at least 37 people occurred less than two minutes after the pilots were warned about dangerous wind shear during a violent thunderstorm, an investigator said Sunday, AP reports from Charlotte.

US Air Flight 1016 from Columbia, S C tore through telephone poles before slamming into the ground Saturday night with 52 passengers and five crew members aboard. The DC-9 was trying to circle Charlotte-Douglas International Airport after the pilot aborted one attempt to land.

The tower had issued a wind-shear alert after the wind direction shifted by almost 90 degrees in nine seconds, John Hammerschmidt, an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board, told a news conference.

US has no imminent plans to invade Haiti

WASHINGTON, July 4: The United States has no imminent plans to invade Haiti but is ready to protect Americans in the Caribbean nation from the ruling military junta US special envoy William Gray said Sunday, reports AFP.

Gray said in a television interview that Washington was committed to using economic sanctions and political pressure to force the junta to step down but had not ruled out the military option.

The United States is not contemplating an imminent invasion of Haiti, said Gray, the special representative of President Bill Clinton.

But he added, "in light of the escalating human rights violations and the repression... there is great concern that we

must be prepared to protect American citizens."

Gray said thousands of Americans were still living in Haiti, where the military is resisting international pressure to cede power of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, whom they ousted as president in 1991.

The United Nations has imposed an economic embargo and the United States has taken additional steps such as halting commercial flights in the crisis, which has sent 5,000 Haitians fleeing in rickety boats in the last two weeks.

"We are committed that we are not going to allow a group of thugs to take over a country," Gray said. But he side-stepped question on what the United States would do if the

sanctions did not work.

Senator John McCain, a member of the senate armed services committee said on television that the White House and the State Department were making plans for an invasion but that the Pentagon was adamantly opposed.

He said military officials consider any invasion an easy six hours affair, but they don't know what they would do once they get there and there has been no other country so far willing to engage militarily.

McCain called for an end to the embargo, which he said hurt the Haitian people, its better to have a military dictatorship than have people literally starving to death, said the republican can from the Western State of Arizona.

ROK ready to help North for safer N-reactor

SEOUL, July 4: Prime Minister Lee Yung-duk said Monday South Korea is willing to help North Korea pay for a safer, modern nuclear reactor if the North clears up suspicion that it is developing nuclear weapons, reports AP.

Testifying before the National Assembly, Lee said the Communist North's decision to replace its outdated graphite-moderated reactor with a safer light-water reactor is "positive."

The North's graphite-moderated reactor, developed by the Soviet Union, is known to produce an excessive amount of plutonium, a material that can be used to make atomic bombs.

"If North Korean fully resolves its nuclear problem, we will jointly work with the international society on ways to assist them in obtaining a light-water reactor," Lee said.

A Western-developed light-water reactor, ranging in capacity from 600 megawatts to

900 megawatts, is priced at 800 million dollars to 1 billion dollars.

South Korea gets nearly half of its electricity from nuclear power plants. It currently has nine reactors in operation, and is building seven more, including three developed with its own nuclear technology.

Providing North Korea with a light-water reactor is expected to be a major issue discussed at high-level US-North Korea talks, scheduled to open in Geneva next week.

The Communist North has openly pledged that it will freeze its suspect nuclear programme if it is given a light-water reactor. The United States has promised to consider the North Korean demand.

The North currently has one 5-megawatt graphite-moderated reactor in operation and is known to be building a 50-megawatt reactor and a 200-megawatt reactor.

Nuclear tensions rose sharply last month when the North began refuelling the 5-megawatt experimental reactor without UN inspectors present.

If the North reprocesses fuel rods removed from the reactor, it can get enough plutonium to make several atomic bombs, Western experts say.

In response to a legislator's question, Lee also said the North's nuclear problem will be a major issue in the first-ever Korean summit set for later this month in the North's capital of Pyongyang.

In preparation talks Saturday, the Koreans reached full agreement on logistics of the presidential summit, scheduled for July 25-27.

A 17-member South Korean advance team will visit the North next week to prepare for the summit, the first since the division of the peninsula into the Communist North and the capitalist South in 1945.

Off the Record

Neem has anti-anxiety effects

NEW DELHI: Chewing fresh "neem" leaves will leave you sedate and composed, caring two hoots about whether you will miss your bus or fail in your exams or get fired by your boss, new research findings suggest, reports PTI.

Extracts of fresh leaves of neem (Azadirachta indica) have a distinct anti-anxiety effect and are as good, as popping in a calmpose pill, experiments with rats indicate.

The finding by a team of researchers from the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi, was reported in the latest issue of the Indian journal of experimental biology.

The finding is the latest in the growing list of virtues of neem, a tree common through India and already being tapped for its insecticidal and contraceptive properties.

Its extract is also known to be beneficial in microbial infections, skin diseases and dental disorders, besides reducing hypertension and high blood sugar levels and treating ulcers.

The latter properties are being linked with anti-stress properties observed in neem.

Mother throws baby into open sewer for crying

MANILA: A destitute mother has been detained after throwing her eight-month-old baby into an open sewer in the Philippine capital after the child began wailing due to hunger, police said Monday, reports AFP.

Josephine Navarro, 25, was held as navy and the coast guard divers ended a futile search for the infant girl in the filthy sewer on Sunday.

But police inspector Hernan de Soto told AFP they would have to wait for the body to float before they could file infanticide charges against the mother.

Navarro, a mother of three who is married to a jailed convict, "apparently went out of her mind" late Saturday when her baby began to cry after milk ran out of her feeding bottle while the two were aboard a mini-bus, he said.

When the vehicle was stopped by traffic atop a bridge, the woman got off and several fellow passengers saw her tossing the baby onto the Reina Regent sewer, De Soto said.

Americans today less patriotic

PRINCETON: Most Americans think they're very patriotic but their neighbours aren't, according to a Gallup poll released for Monday's national Independence Day holiday, reports AP.

Two-thirds of those polled described themselves as extremely patriotic (21 per cent) or very patriotic (43 per cent). Just 28 per cent said they are only somewhat patriotic and 7 per cent said they are not especially patriotic.

But nearly three-quarters of respondents said Americans are less patriotic today than in previous decades.

Feelings of patriotism varied by age, with younger adults least likely to feel very patriotic.

Almost half of those polled said the next generation of Americans will enjoy less personal freedom than the current generation.

Older, wealthier people were more likely to see government regulations as a serious threat to freedom. Younger people and non-whites were more likely to see lack of economic opportunity as a serious threat.

The Gallup Organisation interviewed 1,013 adults by phone June 17-19. Results have a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Mini town for gay men

BANGKOK: A Thai real estate developer is building a mini-town for gay men that will feature everything from theatres to sports facilities, reports AP.

"Gay men need a place to live where they can feel comfortable and accepted," said Dejdeeow Srichai, a gay and the project manager for Flower Town, to be completed in August in the northeastern province of Korat.

He said Monday that the 32-hectare (80-acre) resort will include apartment buildings, houses, mini-marts restaurants, snooker halls, bars and health clinics.

An advertising leaflet says the resort will have "handsome and charming" male staff to bring "excitement or entertainment to your room, everything and everywhere."

The resort also accepts as residents heterosexual people who accept gays, Dejdeeow said.

Dejdeeow said 30 per cent of housing units have been booked, and of these, 10 per cent have been sold to foreigners.

He situated the project about 160 kilometers (100 miles) north of Bangkok because it is a quiet area and less likely to draw complaints from anti-gay people. The exact location is being divulged only to buyers.

Dejdeeow said the project was the first of its kind in Thailand, but a similar development is being built in Pattaya, a seaside resort town near Bangkok.

Hema, Sajith refuse to be UNP candidates

COLOMBO, July 4: The widow of Sri Lanka's assassinated President Ranasinghe Premadasa and her son said today they will not stand as ruling party candidates in August general elections, reports AFP.

Hema Premadasa and her son Sajith said this was because of President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga's refusal to reopen investigations into Premadasa's 1993 May Day murder.

"We have always been United National Party members. But my husband's own party is refusing to appoint an independent commission to investigate his killing. It is a matter of principle," Hema Premadasa said.

Nominations for the elections opened today and Premadasa said she and her son would remain neutral.

Sajith, who was appointed to the UNP's policy-making working committee last month, said he was resigning his party post and was declining UNP nominations to stand

in the southern Hambantota district.

"The government's refusal to investigate not only raises eyebrows but also craters suspicions... I will not contest under the UNP banner, not over my father's dead body," he told AFP.

He said he had accepted Wijetunga's invitation to join the ruling party working committee in the belief that he would persuade the leadership to agree to an independent public inquiry into his father's death, but he had failed.

President Wijetunga's UNP which faces a tough challenge from a combined opposition has been banking on the Premadasa family to attract a sympathy vote.

The UNP's General Secretary Gamini Wijesekera said last month he saw no reason to object to a fresh probe but a few days later the party ruled otherwise.

President Wijetunga dissolved parliament six months early to clear the way for a snap poll on August 16.

China opens N-centre to local tourists

HONG KONG, July 4: China has opened its first nuclear weapon research and manufacturing centre to local tourists as well as overseas Chinese, a report said today, says AFP.

The massive complex, located in Haiyuan county in the northwestern Qinghai region, has already drawn Chinese tourists from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, the Hong Kong based China news service said.

The report did not say when the formerly restricted

site, known as "Atomic city," will be opened to other foreigners, but Chinese tourists have already been pouring non-stop into the grassy area along the shore of Qinghai lake.

The base, according to the report, was the backbone for China's 16 nuclear tests in the past 30 years.

It was also the birthplace of China's first atomic bomb, exploded on October 16, 1964, and subsequently the country's first Hydrogen bomb.

Forest fires blaze Spain

MADRID, July 4: Wildfires were blazing furiously late Sunday in the provinces of Teruel and Gadalajara, central Spain, and in Catalonia, north-west Spain, local authorities said, reports AFP.

In the Villariengo plain in Teruel a fire was advancing on several fronts, fanned by wind and high temperatures. Authorities said the blaze was "out of control" but could not say how much woodland had been affected.

Those blazes had already destroyed more than 150 hectares of woodland, the authorities said.

Women's empowerment to be key topic at Cairo confce

WASHINGTON, July 4: Birth control alone cannot stabilize the world's growing population; it needs to be combined with the empowerment of women and improvement in child survival rates, says Vice President Albert Gore, reports USIS.

Gore made his comments at a panel discussion of population experts hosted by the National Academy of Sciences on June 30.

The Vice President said there has been a "misunderstanding" between the developed and developing countries on the idea of stabilizing population growth. While

rapid economic growth led to rising incomes and smaller families in the developed countries, he said, this is not happening in many developing countries where economic growth has failed to stem rising birth rates because of inequitable distribution and other reasons.

Gore, who will be leading the US delegation to the United Nations conference on population and development in Cairo in September, said the meeting can lead to a "partnership" between the North and South to explore ways to stabilize population in "the cultural and societal con-

text of countries wishing to participate."

Earlier, President Clinton told the conference participants that in Cairo the United States will join the international community in pursuing "a new plan of action to attack the population problem as part of the larger issue of sustainable development" and that at the top of the US agenda will be "active support for efforts to invest in the women of the world."

Timothy Wirth, under secretary of state for global affairs, said the Clinton administration has doubled the amount

of money for family planning programmes in its fiscal 1995 foreign aid request to nearly 600 million dollars. He said US commitments could go to dollars 1,000 million by 2000.

Wirth said 5,000 million to 6,000 million dollars a year is being spent worldwide on family planning programmes, with two-thirds of the amount coming from developing countries. He said if every woman who wants family planning assistance were to receive it, then the annual bill could double to 12,000 million dollars every year.

Nafis Sadik, secretary-general of the Cairo conference,

said Islamic countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh have actively backed family planning programmes in their own countries. She said even countries such as Iran and the Sudan have not opposed family planning in principle if it can lead to better living standards for their people.

Sadik said the Cairo conference will have enough representation from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to make the peoples' voice heard along with that of government officials. She said 1,000 NGOs were represented at preparatory meetings.