

BRIEFLY

Indians kidnap 4 US fishermen:

Four US fishermen were kidnapped by armed Indians while fishing off the northern Atlantic coast of Nicaragua over the weekend and were being held for 300,000 dollar ransom, the army said Monday. Reuter reports from Managua.

They (the kidnapers) said that if in the next three hours they are not given what they asked for, they will start to execute them, army captain Douglas Loaising told Reuters.

The three-hour period expired at 3 PM (1900 GMT) without any word on the kidnapping. The kidnapping took place in shallow waters near the border with Honduras, a sparsely populated area about 250 miles (400 kms) northeast of Managua, Loaising said.

Forest fires claim 8 in Spain:

Eight people were killed as forest fires ripped through eastern Spain on Monday, destroying thousands of hectares of land and forcing the evacuation of hundreds of people, officials said, Reuter reports from Valencia.

Three firefighters and two other people died as they struggled to contain a blaze that had destroyed 800 hectares (2,000 acres) in the Valencia region.

The fire was the fiercest of about 14 burning in eastern Spain. In the Catalonia region, three hikers were killed and seven injured when they sought refuge from the flames in a cave. A civil guard and a firefighter were also injured.

2 newsmen held in Guwahati:

The police Tuesday arrested two city based journalists under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) for their alleged links with ULFA, PTI report from Guwahati.

Official sources said Ajit Bhuyan, editor of a local weekly "Sadin" and Ramendra Narayan Dutta Baruah, editor "News Star," an English daily, were picked up from their homes by the police.

The sources said the two were arrested for having alleged links with ULFA revealed during interrogation of one of the militants.

2 die in Mexican quake:

Two people died Monday when a strong earthquake rocked the southern part of Mexico, but there were no immediate reports of other damage or injuries, AP reports from Oaxaca.

The two masons were buried alive when the quake brought down a stone wall on top of them in the city's historic centre, said civil defence officials.

The US Geological Survey's National Earthquake Centre in Golden, Colo. estimated the preliminary magnitude of the quake at 6.0. The agency said it struck at 4:36 pm (2136 GMT).

Castro thanks Franco:

Brazilian President Itamar Franco received a letter from his Cuban counterpart Fidel Castro thanking him for the support from the Brazilian government to Cubans during the fourth Ibero-American Summit, reports in Brasilia yesterday said, Xinhua says.

During the summit held last month in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, Franco asked Ibero-American countries to re-examine Cuba's return to the international stage and affirmed that only dialogue and rapprochement, not exclusion and embargoes, will lead to a valid and complete democracy on the continent.

Arab FMs for truce in Yemen

KUWAIT CITY, July 5: Foreign ministers from eight key Arab states called today for an immediate ceasefire in Yemen as they opened a meeting here to discuss the civil war that began in May, reports AFP.

"We call for an immediate ceasefire," around the besieged southern city of Aden, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah said at the opening of the two-day meeting.

The call came as northern troops entered the city of Aden and, according to an independent source in Aden, captured Mukalla where southern leader Ali Salem Al-Baid is based.

Minister from the six Gulf states of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar, as well as Egypt and Syria are attending the meeting of the Damascus Declaration, which they signed in 1991 at the end of the Gulf War.

The Gulf states except Qatar implicitly recognised the breakaway Yemen Democratic Republic, declared by the South on May 21 at a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council in June.

Egypt has repeatedly held Yemen President Ali Abdallah Saleh, a northerner, responsible for continued fighting in spite of seven ceasefire calls.

Meanwhile, Syria has called on the warring parties to stop fighting and start talking to resolve their political differences.

Foreign ministers from the eight countries were also to review the situation in the region "at a time when Iraq has not fully conformed to UN resolutions," imposed during the Gulf crisis, Kuwaiti officials said.

AP reports from Sanaa: On Monday, government artillery and rocket batteries pounded Aden, killing 25 people and wounding 75, a news agency reported.

The government also claimed it toppled the separatist stronghold of Mukalla in heavy fighting involving tanks, warplanes and ground troops.

The report could not be immediately confirmed from independent sources, and comment from the southern command was unavailable.

Diplomats in the northern capital, Sanaa, however, confirmed the Kuwait News Agency report that Aden was still under fire. They spoke on condition of anonymity.

The fall of Mukalla, on the Gulf of Aden, would mark a major setback for southerners trying to break away from a united Yemen.

Hostilities erupted May 4 following months of feuding between President Ali Abdallah Saleh, a northerner, and his southern vice-president, Ali Salem Al-Baid.

Conservative North Yemen and socialist South Yemen merged into a single state in May 1990. The union was popular but beset by cultural and ideological differences and a power struggle between Saleh and Beidh.

Beidh announced the South's independence on May 20, seeking to break up the impoverished nation of 14 million into two states once again. But his new "Democratic Republic of Yemen" has not been recognised internationally.

Beidh was sighted several times during the 2-month-old war in Mukalla. The north claims he has fled the secessionist capital, Aden.

A senior officer at the northern Defense Ministry, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said government forces began the attack Monday morning and entered Mukalla in mid-afternoon. He said fighting was continuing Monday night, and claimed many southern troops were surrendering or fleeing.

An official government statement said "large numbers of mercenaries — officers and soldiers — and large numbers of weapons were captured."

Off the Record

Saleswoman with 'serious personal hygiene problem'

TORONTO: A judge upheld the firing of a Calvin Klein fragrance demonstrator dismissed by her former bosses because they believed her body odour made her a poor perfume saleswoman, reports AP.

Sharon Bagnall was fired by Calvin Klein Canada in 1991 for what the company termed a "serious personal hygiene problem" and for allegedly disruptive behaviour at odds with the cosmetic giant's image.

Bagnall, 52, fought back with a 150,000 dollars lawsuit alleging she was wrongfully dismissed. Witnesses testified at her trial that she was always impeccably groomed, didn't smell and acted professionally on the job.

But in a decision released Monday, Justice Lee Ferrier of Ontario Court's general division said he believed Calvin Klein witnesses who testified she smelled like an armpit.

"I'm stunned," Bagnall said. "I felt like I died all over again. I had to get out and go for a walk because I couldn't breathe. I only did this for justice, not money, and I only told the truth. I don't have a job, I haven't had work for a long time and I don't have a bank account. I don't have anything."

Dog shoots young master

WARSAW: A young man was shot in the leg by his dog, the Polish news agency PAP reported Monday, says AFP.

The man, from Bytowo near Slupsk in northern Poland, had taken his dog with him to do some target practise in his garden. He had just leant his rifle up on his car and walked off to fix the target when the dog knocked the rifle over, sending a volley of lead into his master.

The young man was taken to hospital, where he had to have an operation. The agency did not say what happened to the dog.

Women sue because Norplant proves hard to remove

BOSTON: Paula already had two children and wanted to hold off on a third, so she asked her gynecologist for Norplant, reports AP.

Fifteen months later, Paula discovered that the six match stick-sized contraceptive capsules under the skin of her upper left arm were harder to take out than put in. She is among about 200 women who filed a class action suit against Norplant maker Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories, claiming they suffered permanent injury during removal.

Norplant was first approved in Finland in 1983. It has since been approved in about 15 countries. The US Food and Drug Administration approved it in 1990.

Paula, who spoke on condition that her last name not be used, said her doctor told her the capsules got stuck in her arm.

"She was pulling and yanking them, but they weren't going anywhere," said Paula, 26. "It was painful I have a scar that isn't going away."

The lawsuit was filed in Chicago earlier this month. It seeks undisclosed damages and an injunction to prevent Wyeth-Ayerst from selling Norplant to doctors who have not been properly trained to insert and remove it, said plaintiff lawyer Jerry Klein.

Norplant capsules are designed to remain in the arm for about five years, slowly releasing a synthetic hormone that prevents pregnancy.



Two Rwandan refugees cry in joy and hug each other in a refugee camp of the Holy Michael Church in Kigali on Monday after they learnt that the city was taken over by the rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front from government soldiers. — AFP photo

Santosh Basak dead

CALCUTTA, July 5: Santosh Basak, correspondent of the Associated Press (AP) of American and former news editor of the Statesman, died of lung cancer here this morning, reports PTI.

He was 64 and is survived by his widow, a son and a daughter.

Born in East Bengal, Basak started his journalistic career in 1950 with the Dhaka Daily "Azad" but soon fell for the camera. He became a stringer of the AP at Dhaka and travelled extensively photographing events in Bangladesh and eastern India. Among the important events covered by him were the influx of Bangladeshi refugees during the war in Bangladesh, the end of Chogyal's rule in Sikkim and the Bihar famine.

One of his photographs of Bangladeshi refugees, captioned "son carries mother" won the World Press Photo Foundation award in 1971. The same year, the University of Missouri School of Journalism and the News Photographers Association jointly awarded his pictures on Bangladeshi refugees as the news pictures of the year.

Basak joined the Statesman as a sub-editor in 1960 and rose to become its news editor in 1986.

2 high officials executed in China

BEIJING, July 5: China has executed two high-ranking officials from companies attached to central government agencies, press reports said today, in another highly publicised assault on senior-level corruption, reports AFP.

Monday's executions in Beijing of Guo Zhen and Hu Cong were announced by the Vice President of the Supreme People's Court, Liu Jiachen, and published in all major Chinese newspapers, reflecting government desire to be seen to crack down on graft among senior officials.

Guo, 52, was sentenced to death and executed for taking bribes worth 468,000 yuan (54,000 dollars) while he was General Manager of the China Coal Marketing and Transportation Co.

Hu, a 38-year-old departmental director with the Fujian Agricultural Comprehensive Development and Investment Co, was also executed for taking bribes totalling 1.368 million yuan in exchange for illegally extending state loans worth 64.85 million yuan to unqualified borrowers.

The sentences were carried out by the Beijing Intermediate People's Court on Monday after approval from the Supreme Court.

US won't recognise Russian sway over E Europe

WASHINGTON, July 5: President Clinton said in remarks released today that the United States would not recognise any future Russian attempt to re-establish sway over Eastern Europe, reports Reuter.

"We don't recognise the whole sphere-of-influence concept," he said before leaving tonight on a week-long trip designed largely to show his support for an integrated Europe.

The president sought to allay fears that the former Communist-ruled East European countries might be left in a limbo between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which is not yet ready to accept them as full members.

"It's very important not to underestimate this 'Partnership for Peace' he said, referring to limited association with the United States and its NATO partners offered earlier this year to all former members of the Warsaw Pact as a means of enhancing European security.

Clinton made his comments in an interview on Friday with Polish reporters. His remarks were released by the White House for publication today.

His trip, third to Europe this year, will take him to Latvia, Poland and Germany as well as to the annual meeting of the Group of Seven economic powers, which opens Friday in Naples, Italy. All told, he is due to hold talks with at least 13 chiefs of state or heads of government.

Clinton's first stoppage is Riga, Latvia, where he will meet the Baltic presidents and speak at Riga's freedom monument Wednesday to a crowd packed with visitors from neighbouring Lithuania and Estonia.

Russia has withdrawn from Lithuania troops left behind by the collapse of Soviet power, and has agreed to pull its troops out of Latvia by August 31. But it has not agreed to leave Estonia, which Moscow accuses of discriminating against its Russian minority.

The Baltic states, independent between the two World Wars, were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 and regained their independence in 1991.

Plea to arrest Punjab 'supercop'

NEW DELHI, July 5: A lawyers' panel on Monday asked a court to order the immediate arrest of India's best-known police officer for his role in the thrashing of two reporters at a news conference called by him, reports AFP.

The petition against "supercop" K P S Gill came a day after the government ordered a high-level probe into the incident which occurred after his election as the chief of India's hockey federation.

The lawyers' forum for civil liberties in its petition also urged the Delhi High Court to order the Central Bureau of Investigation to probe Friday's beating of the two sport reporters in a luxury hotel here.

The forum's petition, which is scheduled to come up for hearing on Wednesday, coincided with condemnation of the assault by the ruling Congress (I) party and the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The Congress said the attack was "shameful" and the BJP demanded a high-level inquiry, saying a police probe was not enough.

Gill, police chief in the northern state of Punjab, has come under scathing attack from journalists and human rights groups. He himself ordered an enquiry saying he felt "hurt" by the incident.

Gufran-E-Azam, vice chief of the hockey federation, quit his post Sunday and demanded life imprisonment for Gill, who is credited with crushing Sikh militancy in Punjab.

Reporters Rahul Banerjee and Abhijit Das of the Statesman newspaper were repeatedly punched and kicked by Gill's supporters after they asked questions on hockey which reportedly embarrassed the officer at Friday's conference.

Gill's commandos later dragged the pair out of a hotel where they had been battered.

New wave of cancer to strike Chernobyl liquidators

SAINT PETERSBURG, July 5: A new wave of cancers caused by radiation will strike hundreds of thousands of "liquidators" who fought the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl with no protection, scientists have predicted, reports AFP.

Some 170,000 technical experts and emergency workers received massive doses of radiation when they were sent to tackle the effects of the explosion in the reactor in the nuclear power plant near Kiev, Ukraine, in April 1986.

It was by far the worst civilian nuclear catastrophe on record, contaminating large areas of northern, central and western Europe and irradiating an estimated 800,000 people.

Officially 31 were killed, but the real death toll has been put at between 6,000 and 8,000 by independent sources.

Last week in Saint Petersburg 200 Russian and foreign scientists met to draw up a programme of international aid for the liquidators. The plan will soon be submitted to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations for funding, said Andrei Krivorushko of the Russian Centre for Ecological Medicine.

Alexander Velikin, of the association of former liquidators of northwest Russia, said that 10,000 of the group's members had officially been declared invalid since the disaster.

In 1993 we had a record number of invalidity cases," he said. "In Saint Petersburg — home to some 5,000 liquidators — there were 120 last year, out of a total of 357 declared since 1987."

Krivorushko said that 1993 was the first peak in the sickness cycle. According to studies carried out abroad and in Russia, a new wave of cancers and blood ailments can be expected to strike victims within the next five years.

One of the most important sources that these predictions are based on, is the long-kept secret explosion of nuclear waste at a site now called Chelabinsk-65 in the Urals in 1957, Krivorushko said.

Apart from cancers and blood diseases, the former liquidators suffer from heart, liver and stomach problems, premature ageing, psychological troubles, migraines and loss of memory.

Armitr Winberg, head of the Houston Cancer Research Centre, said the psychological effect of Chernobyl was at least as destructive as the explosion itself.

He said that apart from medical care, liquidators should also be helped to lead a normal life again through social and psychological care which would be included in the aid programme.

The plan was drawn up at the initiative of the WHO and the governments of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

Russia provides liquidators with one or two months of hospital care a year, plus a pension of around 10 dollars a month, support which Velikin said was far from sufficient.

Israeli epidemiologist John Goldsmith said that other countries were beginning to become more aware of the problem, now that some, like the United States and Israel, had become directly concerned.

Some 5,000 liquidators had since settled in the United States, he said, while at least 2,000 had gone to Israel.

In addition, up to 20 per cent of the half-million Jewish emigrants from the former Soviet Union who have gone to Israel over the past three years, could also have received doses of Chernobyl's radiation, he said.

Americans celebrate Independence Day

WASHINGTON, July 5: Americans celebrated Independence Day Monday with the traditional fireworks and parties, but there was no Fourth of July miracle in California where Brazil edged past the United States in World Cup Football, reports AFP.

Some of the biggest fireworks displays were in Washington where over 300,000 people packed the mall to see the spectacular display centered around the Washington monument Obelisk.

President Bill Clinton was on hand, too, in the adjacent White House, having returned earlier in the evening from the presidential retreat at Camp David in Maryland to take in the dazzling show.

An estimated 225,000 people watched the traditional Boston pops concert in Massachusetts followed by a fireworks display over the Charles river and the flare of rockets again lit up the East river in New York.

There were accidents in at least two places, however. A fireworks technician was killed and two others critically injured in Pompano beach, Florida when a shell exploded prematurely, and in Gloucester City, New Jersey a shell sheered off route into a crowd watching a youngsters' baseball game, injuring at least 30 people.

There was a near tragedy at Seeley Lake, Montana when a single-engine plane crashed onto a school tennis court killing the pilot and just missing 100 toddlers gathered for a Fourth of July celebration.

The children were waiting for the small aircraft to drop pingpong balls as part of a concert sponsored by local businesses.

But it was on the roads where most deaths occurred as part of the big Fourth of July traffic movements. Sunday had been the deadliest day ever in Texas with 43 people losing their lives. By Monday the death toll in that state was at 63.

In the World Cup, it was a dream setting for the emerging US football side, taking on the mighty Brazil at Palo Alto, California.

Iraqi dissident urges UN to lift sanctions

LONDON, July 5: An Iraqi dissident on Monday called for the United Nations to lift sanctions against Iraq because he said they were helping to prop up President Saddam Hussein's government, reports Reuter.

Faleh Abd Al-Jabbar, a dissident journalist living in Britain, spoke at a London news conference to launch a book, "Iraq since the Cold War," written by prominent Iraqi opposition figures.

"Sanctions have made Iraq people think the West is punishing them. They need to be lifted because they are helping Saddam Hussein to stay in power," Al-Jabbar told Reuters in an interview.

Oil workers strike to free Abiola

LAGOS, July 5: Nigeria's main oil workers union went on strike on Monday to demand the release of opposition leader Moshood Abiola as the military government again refused to produce him in court, reports Reuter.

For the second time in a week, the government which detained Abiola on June 23 on treason charges, disobeyed a judge's order to bring him to court in response to a suit challenging the arrest.

The state prosecutor said he did not know the whereabouts of Abiola, the millionaire businessman adjudged to have won last year's presidential election till it was annulled by yet another military ruler, General Sani Abacha.

As hundreds of Abiola supporters gathered outside the federal high court in Lagos carrying placards like "Give us our president", a senior police officer told the court Abiola would be brought to court later this week.

Judge Tajuddeen Oduowo, annoyed that his order had been disregarded for the second time, ordered that Justice Minister and Attorney-General Olu Onagoruwa should appear before him on Thursday to explain why Abiola was not brought to court.

The 150,000-strong union Nupeng ordered its members out on strike in support of Abiola. But the oil companies said the walkout — by tanker drivers, clerks, data processors and others in menial jobs — was having no effect on oil production or shipping of crude, the lifeblood of the Nigerian economy bringing in 90 per cent of its foreign exchange.

US-DPRK high-level talks on Friday

SEOUL, South Korea, July 5: A North Korean delegation left Tuesday for high-level talks with the United States that could prove crucial to resolving the long-running dispute over the North's nuclear programme, reports AP.

The delegation's departure for the talks, to begin Friday in Geneva, was reported without comment by the North's official Korean Central News Agency, monitored in Tokyo.

The reopening of the high-level US-North Korean dialogue was agreed to following former President Jimmy Carter's visit to North Korea last month.

Nor the Korea's Communist government told Carter during his visit that it was willing to take steps to resolve the nuclear dispute. In the wake of that pledge, North and South Korea also agreed to hold their first-ever presidential summit, set July 25-27 in the North's capital of Pyongyang.

A key issue at the Geneva talks is expected to be spent fuel rods that the North has removed from an experimental reactor.

The United States is expected to demand that the rods be safeguarded, either under monitored conditions in the North or outside the country.

The North's refueling of the reactor set off a tense new phase of the nuclear standoff last month.

The International Atomic Energy Agency declared June 2 that the North had carried out the refueling in such a way that made it impossible to determine with certainty whether plutonium had been diverted in the past, possibly for nuclear weapons.

The North claims its nuclear programme is peaceful, but has balked at full inspections that could prove that claim.

The IAEA finding about the refueling prompted the United States, supported by South Korea and Japan, to begin seeking sanctions against the North.

Washington suspended the sanctions pending the outcome of the Geneva talks, but has said bluntly that without progress, it will again set the drive for punitive steps in motion.

Dalai Lama for global demilitarisation

MANAGUA, July 5: The Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, called Monday for global demilitarisation, saying that powerful armies lead to risks of dictatorships, reports AP.

Speaking at the opening of an international conference on new and restored democracies, the Dalai Lama called on delegates from 65 countries "to re-evaluate our concept of a military establishment."

Armed forces have been the worst wartime violators of human rights and are frequently opposed to democracy, said the Dalai Lama, who called for national armies to be "gradually dismantled and replaced with regional collective forces."

Former Thai MP involved in Cambodian coup bid?

PHNOM PENH, July 5: The government was searching Tuesday for a former member of Thailand's Parliament who has been linked with the coup attempt in Cambodia, a senior official said, reports AP.

The Interior Ministry official, who demanded anonymity, said a man holding the passport of police Lt Col Adul Bonnsert, a former Thai lawmaker, was among 15 Thais who entered Cambodia just days before Sunday's attempted coup.

Fourteen of the Thais were arrested early Sunday at the residences of the coup attempt leaders, but the man believed to be Adul escaped, the ministry official said.

Another government official who demanded anonymity said the Thais had flown into Cambodia with Sin Song, a former Cambodian interior minister. Sin Song and Prince Norodom Chakrapong, a son of King Norodom Sihanouk, are accused of leading the coup attempt.

Sin Song remained in detention Tuesday and Chakrapong was in Malaysia after being expelled from Cambodia.

Interior Minister You Hockry declined to identify the missing Thai but said he was a former member of Parliament.

"I don't know if the man is still in Phnom Penh or has left Cambodia," he said. "We are searching for him now."

A senior official in the Information Ministry, who also demanded anonymity, said men arrested in connection with the coup attempt told investigators there still were hundreds of weapons hidden around the capital. The administration was searching for them Tuesday.