

Emergency in Lanka to continue

COLOMBO, July 6: Sri Lanka's five-year-old state of emergency will continue through parliamentary elections on August 16 contrary to earlier reports it would be lifted. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

I don't think you can let it lapse... because of the situation in the north and the east, he told Reuters in an interview.

Wickremasinghe said President Dingiri Banda Wjetunga would have to re-summon Parliament, which was dissolved at midnight on June 17, to vote on the extension of the emergency.

The emergency rule, which must be extended every month by presidential proclamation and then approved by parliament, was due to lapse on June 15. It was first declared in June 1989 as a means of combatting Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Last Sunday, a spokesman for the Attorney General said the President planned to lift the emergency because he did not want it to remain in force during the elections.

Opposition politicians have accused the government of using emergency rule to harass opponents instead of fighting the rebels.

The state of emergency gives the security forces powers to arrest and detain suspects indefinitely without trial.

The LTTE, which has been fighting for a separate state in Sri Lanka's north and east since 1983 has vowed to disrupt the poll in both areas.

Election Commissioner Chandreanade de Silva told reporters on Tuesday he would go ahead with the poll in both regions despite the threat.

Arab states may take new stand if fighting continues in Yemen

KUWAIT, July 6: Arab powers seeking to end Yemen's war will not recognise the breakaway South for the moment, but they might take new positions on the conflict if fighting continues, a Kuwaiti official said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

It is not possible in any way to hasten towards a recognition now," Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Suleiman Al-Shaheen told reporters after talks in Kuwait between foreign ministers of Egypt, Syria and Gulf Arab states.

There had been speculation that some of the countries might announce recognition of secessionist southern Yemen as a way of pressuring the North into calling off its two-month-old assault on Aden-based southerners.

Shaheen said the ministers had managed to reach a measure of agreement in talks on Tuesday on broad issues concerning the fighting and protection of civilians.

He declined to give details of that agreement.

He added, "The continuation (of the war) without a ceasefire and the securing of Aden and civilian residential areas that would call for taking new positions in the light of the events."

Meanwhile, President Clinton on Tuesday called for an immediate ceasefire in Yemen and the resumption of negotiations to settle outstanding political differences, it said.

A report from Aden adds: Breakaway southern Yemen said its troops beat off an northern tank attack aimed at capturing the airport of its besieged capital, Aden.

Southern forces succeeded in repelling northern units which penetrated to the Khormaksar area near the airport and tried to take control of it," a southern military statement said.

Southern warplanes have used Aden's airport as a base for strafing raids on the more numerous northern forces which have been fighting the south since a four year merger of north and south Yemen collapsed in civil war on May 4.

Both northern and southern Yemen claimed they controlled the port of Mukalla 620 km (390 miles) by road east of Aden which had declared its secession from the unified state.

Off the Record

Fake robbery scheme goes disastrously wrong

BEIJING: A Chinese domestic help who plotted to stage a fake robbery in the house of her employer, ended up dead after the scheme went disastrously wrong, according to a local report seen here Tuesday, reports AFP.

The maid, identified only as Wang, hit upon the scam after reading a newspaper article about a maid in the central city of Wuhan who received a bravery award of 8,000 yuan (920 dollars) after she was injured protecting her employer's house from an intruder, the Guangxi Legal News said.

Wang conspired with a friend from her hometown, named Liu, to fake aggravated robbery that would leave her heroically injured and open to similar financial rewards.

If Liu were actually arrested for robbery and assault, Wang promised to wait until he was released from prison, when she would marry him and split the cash.

The plot foulered on the fact that Liu was unable to stand the sight of blood.

Wang convinced him to shut his eyes and stab her judiciously, which he did — nine times — and she promptly bled to death.

Liu was subsequently arrested for murder, the newspaper said.

Hunt for panty thieves

TOKYO: Police are looking for the man or men who have forcibly stolen the panties from 13 women walking in Tokyo in the last four months, reports AP.

In the latest case, a man in his 20s tore the panties from an 18-year-old woman and fled on a motorbike Monday evening, an office said Wednesday.

Another woman scared off a would-be panty robber Tuesday morning by screaming loudly, said the officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

None of the 13 women involved has been hurt, police said. A person convicted of indecent assault can face up to seven years in prison in Japan.

Law to curb 'social evils' among civil servants

HANOI: Government workers in Vietnam face fines and even the sack if they succumb to "social evils" like prostitution, drunkenness or gambling under new regulations, reports Reuter.

The official Tuoi Tre (youth) newspaper published a government order signed by Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet to introduce tough punishments for state employees who broke the law.

"Sex customers who are state employees will be fined between 100,000 dong (10 dollars) and one million dong (100 dollars)," the newspaper quoted the order as saying.

"A repeat of the act will result in a fine of between 1.5 million dong (150 dollars) and two million dong (200 dollars) and the sack," Tuoi Tre quoted the declaration as saying on Tuesday.

Civil servants who sold their bodies would be fined and disciplined but not sacked, it reported without elaborating.

State employees who took drugs or gambled faced fines of up to 300,000 dong (30 dollars) and would be reported to their offices for further disciplinary action. Staff who got drunk in public faced a maximum fine of 200,000 dong (20 dollars) it said.

Vietnam's communist government has launched various campaigns to curb what it calls "social evils" but these regulations are the first to single out state employees, who account for 10 per cent of Vietnam's 32 million workers.

Most state employees in Vietnam earn about 300,000 to 500,000 dong (30 to 50 dollars) per month.

The order also mentioned punishments for non-government workers committing the same crimes, but the newspaper did not give details.

BRIEFLY

Confce on street children: Six Southeast Asian countries are to take part in a seminar aimed at drawing attention to the problem of the region's street children, the European Union (EU) Ambassador to Thailand said Tuesday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam will send both government and non-governmental representatives to the conference, organised by the EU and held in Pattaya, South of Bangkok from July 11 to 13.

Delegates will discuss the situation of street children in each of the participating countries focusing on child labour and prostitution. EU Ambassador Gwyn Morgan told a press conference here.

Tremor shakes Hokkaido: An earthquake registering 5.2 on the Richter scale shook Hokkaido in northern Japan early Wednesday but there were no reports of damage or injuries, the Meteorological agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

There was no fear of tsunami tidal waves, the agency said. The epicentre of the quake, which occurred at 1.27 AM, was located 110 kilometres under the seabed off Tokachi, southeastern Hokkaido, the agency said.

8 Japanese die in fire: Eight people died in a fire that broke out early yesterday in a boarding house in Ebina, southwest of Tokyo, police said, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

The 45 other residents of the three-storey building escaped unharmed, police said. The fire broke out at about 2:00 am local time (1700 GMT) and raged for three hours, gutting the building, the Ebina Fire Department said.

The bodies of the eight victims were found on the second floor, but had yet to be identified due to severe burns, police said. Police are still investigating the cause of the fire.

Afghan woman kills herself: A young Afghan woman in New Delhi burned herself to death at a local UN office after accusing fellow refugees of trying to force her into prostitution, the United News of India (UNI) said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from New Delhi.

It said Ajalal, 30, killed herself in front of the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees on Monday after she delivered a petition there against men she said were harassing her.

UNI said the police arrested Habib Mustafa and were looking for Mohammed Sharif, both Afghan refugees, accused by Ajalal of trying to lure her into prostitution and drug trafficking.

Heatwave claims 4 in Italy: Rome's mayor urged the elderly, the sick and children on Tuesday not to go out of doors in the afternoon because of pollution aggravated by a freak heatwave, Reuter reports from Rome.

Francesco Rutelli issued the ordinance after electronic monitors in several areas of the city recorded high pollution levels.

At least four people have died in Italy in a heatwave that has brought tropical temperature and high humidity to much of the country from the Alps to Sicily.

Spain fire death toll 11: Fires raged for a third day Tuesday in Spain, fanned by strong winds and high temperatures, killing 11 people to date and destroying more than 75,000 hectares (190,000 acres) of forest and bush, AFP reports from Madrid.

Fires on Monday destroyed 32,000 acres around Aragon, 59,000 acres in northeast Catalonia and 12,500 acres in Murcia in the southeast.

Ten regions were hit in Valencia, where six volunteer fire fighters died Monday. At the border of Valencia and Aragon the army deployed a further 200 soldiers to join the 100 or so already helping firemen since Sunday, along with several hundred volunteers.

Flood kills 6 in Georgia: At least six people died Tuesday as heavy rains brought extensive flooding to areas of Georgia, authorities said, AFP reports from Georgia.

The downpours were the remnants of tropical storm Alberto, the first of the tropical season, which swept in from the Gulf of Mexico over the weekend and made landfall along the western Panhandle region of Florida on Sunday.

Authorities in Bibb county said that a man and a woman died when a creek burst its banks and swept away their pickup truck. Elsewhere, a 16-year-old girl drowned when she was swept away while walking her dog in Rockdale county.

Myanmar talks collapse

BANGKOK, July 6: The latest talks between the Myanmar military junta and the Mon rebels who control most of the southwest of the country have collapsed, a guerrilla representative said on Tuesday, reports AFP.

The gap between the two parties is still important," said Neing Tin Aung, one of five negotiators for the new Mon state party, the rebels' political wing.

The Mon have been fighting for a homeland for almost 50 years, but the third round of talks with the authorities broke down over the military settlement and the problems connected to the boundary of the territory," claimed, Neing Tin Aung added.

The talks were held in Moulmein, the Mon state capital from June 26 to July 2. Neing Tin Aung told AFP by telephone.

US won't allow Haitian refugees

WASHINGTON, July 6: Haitians picked up at sea by US coast guard ships will not be allowed into the United States even if they are considered political refugees, the special US adviser for Haiti said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Officials announced meanwhile that four US warships would leave for Haiti to augment forces already offshore there and to prepare for possible evacuation of US citizens still in Haiti.

William Gray, President Bill Clinton's special adviser on Haiti, said the decision on refugees was aimed at stemming the exodus of Haitian boat people and avoiding disasters at sea.

Gray cited reports that as many as 150 people were feared killed over the weekend in the sinking of an overloaded boat off the Haitian coastal town of Saint Marc.

"We urge them to stay at home, we don't want to see people brown at sea," he said, adding that only Haitians who obtain political asylum status through the US embassy in Port-au-Prince would be allowed into the United States.

"The boat people who are in need of protection will be given the opportunity to obtain it in safe haven camps," he added.

The first of the camps will be established in Panama, and agreements in principle have been reached with Dominica and Antigua to set up other camps, Gray said at a White House news conference.

Gray's announcement came as Haitians surged out of the country in rickety unseaworthy boats in hopes of gaining political asylum in the United States.

A total of 3,247 Haitians



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat waves upon his arrival in Gaza City on Tuesday. Arafat had just returned from Jericho, where he spent the day after 48 hours in the self-rule Gaza Strip. —AFP photo

Arafat ends Gaza, Jericho visit

GAZA, July 6: Yasser Arafat, having had a tantalising taste of self-rule winds up his historic visit to Gaza and Jericho today pledging to expand the areas into a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, reports Reuter.

The 64-year-old PLO leader, who inaugurated a Palestinian self-rule administration in Jericho on Tuesday, is to fly to Paris where he will meet Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

PLO official Nabil Shaath said Arafat will end his landmark visit to Gaza at dawn today, stopping over in Cairo before leaving for Paris for talks with Rabin on completing and expanding self-rule in the West Bank.

For five days Arafat, an exile and a symbol for more than a quarter-century, has worked to boost his support among people for whom he is now becoming a flesh-and-blood repository of their needs and demands.

Another report adds: Arafat, ending a visit to self-rule Arab areas, left the Gaza Strip aboard an Egyptian helicopter today, witnesses said.

Arafat was headed for Egypt en route for Paris talks later today with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. They are expected to discuss

France criticised for creating safe zones in Rwanda

UNITED NATIONS, July 6: A US-based human rights group Tuesday criticised France for creating safe zones in Rwanda that shielded army and militia men responsible for most of the killings in the central African country, reports Reuter.

Human Rights Watch, in a letter to French President Francois Mitterrand, said France instead should be arresting those suspected in participating or directing the atrocities.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of the group, said he welcomed French protection of innocent Rwandans at risk.

"At the same time Human Rights Watch respectfully urges you immediately to order France's troops in Rwanda to arrest those individuals who are believed to have participated in atrocities or directed the genocide carried out by the army and militias," he said.

Roth said he was "deeply distressed" by reports that France is insisting the Rwandan Patriotic Front must form a government which includes military officials, some guilty of the massacres.

"Any future government that includes such individuals dooms Rwanda to a repetition of the horrors of the past three months," he added.

DPRK flays ROK

TOKYO, July 6: North Korea angrily denounced the arrest of 23 of its supporters by South Korean security agents and said the detentions cast a dark shadow over upcoming North-South summit talks. Radio Pyongyang said today, reports Reuter.

South Korea's agency for National Security Planning (NSP) arrested on Sunday 23 South Koreans suspected of having actively supported the North, in violation of a ban on all contacts with the hardline

Nicaraguan army free 3 Americans from captivity

MANAGUA, July 6: The army said Tuesday it had freed three US nationals and a Nicaraguan held captive for three days by indigenous Miskito assailants, reports AFP.

Army spokesman Milton Sandoval said the four were unarmed and were taken to the Caribbean town of Puerto Cabezas.

One of the kidnappers was killed in the operation, one was injured and three escaped and were being sought by authorities, according to army spokesman Milton Sandoval.

Four US nationals were abducted in the incident, but one was released Monday because of his age and ill health.

Andreotti member of Mafia?

ROME, July 6: Prosecutors for the first time accused former prime minister Giulio Andreotti of being a member of the Mafia, Italian media reported today, says Reuter.

The reports said the prosecutors who want Andreotti put on trial, have hardened their charges against him from Mafia association to full-fledged membership of the crime organisation.

The move, which the reports said was the result of new investigations, was yet another setback for the 74-year-old life-senator who was prime minister seven times.

In an interview with the Rome newspaper La Repubblica, Andreotti again denied all charges against him and said he did not fully understand the change in the indictment.

Andreotti's lawyer Odoardo Ascarelli called the charges "idiotic".

Prosecutors last month asked a judicial superior to have Andreotti, a Christian Democrat, tried on charges that he had helped the Mafia during his long political career. A senior judge will now decide if there is sufficient evidence to try him.

Andreotti has said the charges, based on testimony from turncoats, were part of a Mafia plot to punish him for crackdowns on organised crime by governments he headed.



Crewmen from a US Coast Guard cutter attempt to rescue three Haitian refugees and an overboard crewmate on Monday after a 40-foot boat containing more than two hundred refugees capsized off the coast of Haiti. —AFP photo

Cambodia may crack down on coup plotters

PHNOM PENH, July 6: The Cambodian coalition government today held an emergency meeting of top officials to discuss a possible crackdown after last weekend's thwarted coup, a senior official said, reports AFP.

As the meeting began, troops surrounded the house of general Sar Moline, a former deputy to ex-Interior Minister Sin Song, who was implicated in the failed coup, the source said, without elaborating.

The meeting, presided by co-premiers Hunsen and Prince Norodom Ranaridh, included the ministers of the Defence and the Interior, as well as high ranking officers from the military and security apparatus, he said.

"The plan of the meeting is to investigate and arrest other people who may have been involved in the coup. We do not know who, but it must be some high ranking officials," he said.

Fourteen Thais were detained in connection with the abortive coup. Sin Song was arrested, but Prince Chakrapong was allowed to leave for Malaysia on Sunday following an appeal from his father, King Norodom Sihanouk.

Meanwhile, the far-left Khmer Rouge guerrillas today accused the government of plotting the coup as a pretext

for declaring "martial law."

The climate of tension, they said in a radio broadcast monitored in Bangkok, would pressure members of the cabinet and parliament to vote for a "fascist law" banning the Khmer Rouge.

Parliament reconvened in Phnom Penh today to debate a bill that would formally outlaw the ultra-nationalist faction, which has been fighting a hit-and-run campaign against the government that emerged from the 1993 un-organised elections in Cambodia.

Germans protest against proposed honour to Li

POTSDAM, Germany, July 6: Politicians in this eastern German city protested Tuesday against a proposed honour to visiting Chinese Premier Li Peng because of his country's human rights record, reports AFP.

Li Peng, due to visit Potsdam today, is expected to sign the golden book reserved for distinguished guests when he visits the Cecilienhof castle where the Potsdam agreement dividing Germany into four occupied zones was signed by the allied victors in August 1945.

Morocco repeals French law

RABAT, July 6: The Moroccan parliament on Tuesday unanimously abrogated a French law that allowed the authorities to jail anyone for activity susceptible of disturbing the peace or failure to respect authority, reports Reuter.

The law promulgated in June 1935 by the French protectorate administration was designed to repress nationalist activity but remained in force after independence in 1956 despite three previous attempts by opposition parties to get it abrogated.

It is a great victory and abolishes an anachronous law used by the authorities to jail anyone for anything, said Abdelwahed Radi leading socialist opposition member of the Chamber of Representatives (Majlis Annahd).