

Hindu festival in Kashmir on Aug 7

Army to protect pilgrims

SRINAGAR, July 21: The Indian army on Wednesday said it will secure routes to a Hindu holy site in Kashmir to prevent Muslim rebels from staging attacks on the tens of thousands of Hindu pilgrims expected to pour into the state next month, reports AFP.

Soldiers were fanning out on roads leading to the holy caves of Amarnath following death threats issued by a Muslim militant group to Hindus planning to take part in the annual pilgrimage.

Brigadier Arjun Singh said reconnaissance teams were scanning routes between the Kashmir town of Pahalgam and Amarnath to strengthen security for the tens of thousands of Hindus who would soon set off on the pilgrimage.

"Our presence will ensure

that no harm is caused to the pilgrims, the officer said ahead of the annual Hindu festival, which begins August 7 and draws Hindus from across India to Amarnath.

An estimated 400,000 Hindu pilgrims walked or drove to Amarnath, where a temple to the Hindu God Shiva is located, last year.

The Harkat-ur-Ansar guerrilla group issued the flat recently to press for the dismantling of security bunkers set up around Kashmir's holiest Islamic shrine, the Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar.

Other Kashmiri groups backed Harkat's demand saying Muslims have not been able to pray at Hazratbal since October when soldiers lifted a month long siege of the shrine and installed bunkers around the complex.

Indo-Pak talks on diplomatic code of conduct soon

ISLAMABAD, July 21: Pakistan and India will hold two rounds of talks in the coming days on a bilateral code of conduct for their diplomats, Foreign Office officials said yesterday, reports AFP.

A similar meeting was scheduled to be held in New Delhi on Thursday between Pakistan's Deputy High Commissioner and a joint secretary from the Indian External Affairs Ministry.

A follow-up session will take place in Islamabad next week between the Indian Deputy High Commissioner and a Director General from the Pakistani Foreign Office.

The talks follow tit-for-tat expulsions of four diplomats, two from each side, earlier this month for alleged espionage, in a repetition of similar diplomatic feuds in the past between the two estranged neighbours.

Yangon proposes Suu Kyi to stay out of country for 5 years

TOKYO, July 21: A top Myanmar military junta leader said Nobel Prize-winning democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi would be freed from house arrest if she agrees to leave the country for five years, a Japanese daily reported today, reports AFP.

The interview took place as Suu Kyi began her sixth year of house arrest in Myanmar.

If she stays out of the country for five years, I'd be happy to welcome her back if she returned home and worked for the sake of the nation, Khin Nyunt said.

Opposition ready to share power with Tamils

COLOMBO, July 21: Sri Lanka's main opposition alliance made an election promise Thursday to share power with minority Tamils in the rebellious north and the east, reports AP.

The People's Alliance, a coalition of seven parties led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, pledged in its election platform to end the 11-year-old ethnic conflict in their election manifesto that was released to the press.

But the Alliance did not elaborate on how they plan to devolve power to the Tamil groups. Several attempts have been made in the past to get the Tamil rebels to agree to partial autonomy, but have failed.

Nusrat was removed from co-chairmanship of PPP in December by the party's Central Executive Committee.

Clinton invites Ter-Petrosyan:

President Clinton has invited Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan to a White House meeting on August 9, the White House said Wednesday, Reuter reports from Washington.

The official working visit will mark Ter-Petrosyan's first meeting with Clinton. Spokeswoman Dee Dee Myers said Clinton looks forward to discussing with Ter-Petrosyan the prospects for resolving the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

She said the two leaders would discuss other regional political issues and continued US support for democratic and market economic reform in Armenia.

Argentine blast toll 35: Rescue workers, aided by Israeli experts have pulled more bodies from the rubble of flattened seven-storey Jewish community centre, bringing the toll to 35 dead and 157 injured, AP reports from Buenos Aires.

The Jewish groups said 76 people were unaccounted for as of Wednesday night, adding several names to an earlier list based on reports from relatives and friends. Three people who had been listed as missing were found alive in different parts of Buenos Aires earlier in the day.

Murayama regrets aggression:

Japan's Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama told Parliament yesterday that Japan should not forget its aggression in attacking other Asian nations during World War II, reports AFP from Tokyo.

Asked about his stance to the war-time record of Japan, Murayama told parliament, "our act of aggression during the war brought unbearable suffering to our neighbours."

He added: "While we keep reflecting what the country did in the past, we need to contribute to the world — that's important."

Bomb attempt on ABC TV chief:

A parcel bomb addressed to the president of the ABC television network was discovered in Jackson, Mississippi, on Tuesday, the second failed bombing attempt against him in two months, Reuter reports from New York.

An ABC spokeswoman said the package was mailed to Robert Iger, president of the ABC television network group in New York.

In May, a package addressed to Iger and sent from Mobile, Alabama, was discovered by a secretary at the New York headquarters of the network. It was defused without incident.

Indonesia-Malaysia naval exercise:

Indonesia and Malaysia will hold joint naval exercises next week involving 12 warships around the South China Sea, a naval spokeswoman said yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

The spokeswoman said the exercises will last from July 25 to 28. She gave no further details.

Lieutenant Colonel Kusmandar, spokesman for Indonesia's eastern fleet, was quoted by the Antara News Agency on Thursday as saying the warships would sail from west Kalimantan the Indonesian part of Borneo Island to the South China Sea and then to Indonesia's Riau Islands.

Thousands welcome Murtaza in Punjab

LAHORE, July 21: Thousands of people turned out to welcome Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's estranged brother Murtaza to the politically key province of Punjab on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Witnesses said about 10,000 supporters flocked to the airport, chanting "Jeyav (long live) Murtaza" as he made his first trip to Punjab, which analysts consider crucial to his political ambitions.

Murtaza is widely seen to be aspiring to top post in the possibility of a split in the party founded by their father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the last 1960s.

Bhutto became effective head of the party after a 1977 military coup toppled the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was executed two years

Greek Cypriots demonstrate in London: 4 held

LONDON, July 21: An angry crowd of 4,000 Greek Cypriots living in London staged a noisy demonstration outside the Turkish Embassy Wednesday night against Turkey's Cyprus invasion 20 years ago, reports AP.

British police arrested four of the demonstrators when sections of the crowd began throwing objects. The demonstration continued peacefully after the arrests. Scotland Yard said

The demonstration began Wednesday afternoon with about 150 people but numbers later swelled. The crowd chanted "Turkish troops out of Cyprus" and waved flags and placards.

MOSCOW, July 21: The saleswoman was bewildered.

"Solzhenitsyn? We don't keep his writings. Who would want to read them anyway?" she wondered, standing in front of a display of detective stories, thrillers, romance novels and science fictions, reports AP.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 75, a former exile and one of Russia's greatest living writers, is arriving in Moscow on Thursday — the final stop in his 56-day return journey across the vast expanses of Russia.

But will Moscow notice Solzhenitsyn's return?

He comes to a capital largely ignorant of his writings, its people busily making money discussing the heatwave, trying to survive on meager pensions and salaries, shopping, and watching TV

In a public opinion poll last month, 44 per cent of those questioned said they had never read any of Solzhenitsyn's books, and 11 per cent said they had but could not remember exactly what.

"I thought I was returning to a Russian which had read me. It has turned that Russia has not read me," Solzhenitsyn noted bitterly during his trip, which began last month in Vladivostok.

However, the poll by the Mneine (Opinion) service found that 36 per cent of respondents did read his "Gulag Archipelago," a lengthy historic account of Soviet prison camps and political repressions.

Whole layers of history are returning to native soil. I'm pleased with the return of Alexander Isayevich," President Boris Yeltsin said



Children watch on Wednesday as missionaries place the bodies of Rwandan refugees who died from cholera and exhaustion in a common grave in Goma. The exodus of nearly two million refugees has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, a French relief worker said on July 20.

Hitler's birthplace to be made anti-fascism centre

VIENNA, July 21: Austria said on Wednesday it planned to turn the house where Adolf Hitler was born into an anti-fascism centre to deter Neo-Nazis from venerating the building as a shrine, reports Reuter.

The conversion of the small 16th-century house in the town of Braunau, on the border with Germany, with be one of a series of events in Austria next year commemorating the end of World War II, Interior Ministry officials told Reuters.

"We are going to create a centre against fascism, racism and discrimination in Hitler's birthplace... to educate people about the history of national socialism and its results at Mauthausen (concentration camp in Austria)," said Peter Heindl, a senior aide to Interior Minister Franz Loeschnak.

"We also want to hinder Fascists who pay visits like a pilgrimage to Hitler's birthplace.

Hitler was born in Braunau on April 20, 1889, and the date has become a cherished anniversary for some right-wing extremists.

Street battles between rightists and leftists broke out on the anniversary of Hitler's 90th birthday in 1979 and since then police have stepped up security in the town around the date.

US, ROK start talks to break deadlock over North's N-plan

SEOUL, July 21: US Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gallucci, the chief US negotiator with North Korea, opened talks Thursday with South Korean officials on joint strategy for breaking the stalemate over the North's nuclear programme, reports AP.

The talks opened in Geneva on July 8, the day of Kim's death, but were quickly suspended.

Also suspended upon Kim's Junta to consider release of Abiola

The United States, in concert with South Korea and Japan, had moved previously to seek sanctions against the North. The sanctions push was put on hold pending the outcome of the US-North Korean talks.

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Junta to consider release of Abiola

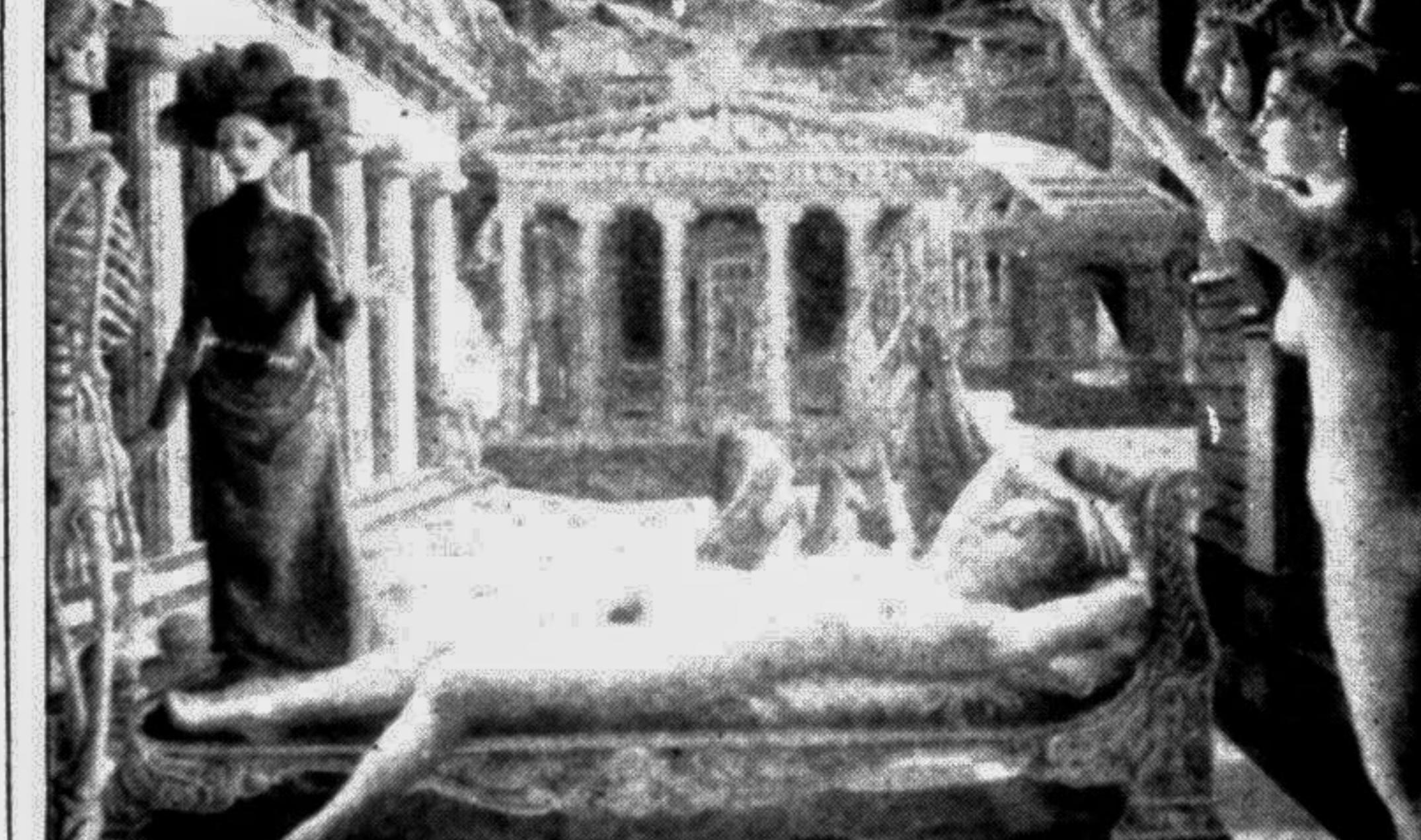
LAGOS, July 21: Nigeria's military junta said on Wednesday it would consider releasing jailed opposition leader Moshood Abiola, reports AFP.

The military ruler General Sani Abacha met with leaders of the powerful Nigerian Labour Congress in the capital Abuja.

Afterward, Information Minister Jerry Gana said the Labour Federation had presented a "very good argument" in favour of Abiola's release and that "the government is going to look into the matter."

Gana added "if the request of labour is what is going to move Nigeria forward peacefully, I am sure the government will consider it."

In the wake of the elder Kim's death, the South has been cracking down on pro-Northern activities.



Undated file picture shows the 1944 painting "La Venus enormous" (The Sleeping Venus) by famous Belgian surrealist Paul Delvaux, who died on Wednesday at the age of 96.

— AFP photo

Off the Record

'Robots to breed like animals'

TOKYO: Robots will be able to "breed" like animals in the near future and may eventually evolve through natural selection, a Japanese researcher said Thursday.

Yoshiaki Ichikawa of the Hitachi Ltd energy research laboratory said he and his team have invented the world's first self-reproducing automation.

It uses micro-chips as "genetic codes" and block components as pre-assembled parts, as "cells."

The centipede-like metal creature assembles itself from block components scattered about the floor to "grow" to twice its original size, before splitting into two identical and independent units, Ichikawa said.

"As long as there is an endless supply of parts, the robot can multiply exponentially," he added.

The blocks are 20 cm long, 10 cm wide and 10 cm high (8x4x4 inches).

"Our foremost motive behind this invention is that we wanted to dispel the popular notion that machines are unreliable because they break down and cannot regenerate," Ichikawa said.

He said the "genetic codes" could in the near future be programmed to create random "mutants."

Mother becomes refugee to save daughter's genitals

TORONTO: Canada has granted refugee status to a Somali woman to protect her 10-year-old daughter from undergoing ritual genital mutilation in Somalia, reports AP.

"I couldn't believe my ears," said Khadra Hassan Farah. "I was prepared to leave my daughter here for adoption if my case was rejected. I couldn't take her back. It's torture."

Many Somali women are forced to undergo a brutal procedure that involves cutting away the external female sexual organs and sewing shut the opening, except for a small hole for urination, she said.

"They did it to me and I didn't want my daughter to go through the same thing, the pain, the infections, the scars," Farah, 30, said in a recent telephone interview from her Ottawa home.

The Immigration and Refugee Board heard Farah's case May 10 in Toronto, said her lawyer, Andrew Rafuse. The board granted Farah verbal approval and sent written confirmation of her successful claim last month, he said.

Canada officially began accepting refugee claims in 1993 from women who say they are being persecuted because of their gender. This is believed to be the first case of a woman claiming refugee status based on the fear of genital mutilation, Rafuse said.

Witch doctor's medicine kills two boys

MOSCOW: Two sick children in the southern Russian republic of Dagestan died after a witch doctor prescribed insecticide to treat them, Itar-Tass news agency said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

A woman, whose three sons were suffering from the disease scabies, took them to the witch doctor because she had no medicine at home.

The witch doctor recommended she put a chemical used as an insecticide, on their wounds and they were poisoned, Tass said.

Doctors in the local hospital were able to save only one of the boys.

Police had started criminal proceedings after the incident.

Rape charge against Congressman's son

ATLANTA: The 24-year-old son of Rep. Kweisi Mfume of Maryland has been charged with raping a woman after a date, reports AP.

Michael Mfume, whose father is chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, was arrested July 14 and jailed until Monday, when he was freed on 35,000 dollars bail.

The Baltimore resident was in Atlanta on business. He and the woman were out with friends for a late-night breakfast, then returned to her apartment, where he allegedly raped her said Barry Batson, Fulton County police spokesman.

"She said it was forced, and he denies that," District Attorney Lewis Slaton said.

The elder Mfume, a Democrat, said in a statement that he and his ex-wife were confident their son would be found innocent.

"No parent ever wants to get the dreaded call that their son or daughter has been charged with violating the law," the elder Mfume said. "Michael, like anyone, is innocent until proven guilty."

Alvin Kendal, the younger Mfume's lawyer, did not immediately return phone calls Wednesday.

China against regional, global hegemony

ISLAMABAD, July 21: Chinese Defence Minister General Chi Hao Tian ended his five-day visit to Pakistan today, reiterating that his country would continue to oppose regional and global hegemony, reports AFP.

The Defence Minister, who headed a military delegation, was seen off by senior officials at the Karachi Airport.

The minister, who flew here Sunday after a visit to Moscow, met his Pakistani counterpart, Aftab Shabir Mirani, and senior army and navy officials.

During the visit, which coincided with the Chinese Foreign Minister's trip to neighbouring India, the Chinese general also met Pakistani Foreign Minister Assef Ahmed Ali, who briefed him on the situation in the region.

Beijing has been an important source of arms for Islamabad. It is also building a 300-megawatt nuclear power station at Chashma in Punjab province.

UN to reduce force in Somalia

UNITED NATIONS: July 21: The United Nations plans to scale back its force in Somalia since the troops are unable to sufficiently ensure security in the African state, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Gh