

Myanmar refugees seek UN guarantee

BANGKOK, July 24: Thousands of Myanmar refugees who fled to Thailand after a Myanmar army paid on their settlement will not go home unless the United Nations refugee agency supervises their return, one of their leaders said today.

The refugees are very frightened of the Myanmar soldiers and they do not want to return to the camp unless the UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) and the Thai authorities guarantee their safety. Major Maung Maung, an officer with the New Mon Army, told Reuters by telephone from the Thai border.

US slates ASEAN

BANGKOK, July 24: Senior American officials remained critical on Sunday of Southeast Asia's dialogue with Myanmar but offered few concrete proposals on how to change the repressive regime in that country, reports AP.

The issue of Myanmar is one of the few areas of disagreement between Washington and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is meeting over the next few days with its key partners, including the United States.

Attack on Shi'ite Muslims continues

KARACHI, July 24: Sectarian violence continued to rock this southern port city today as three more people died, bringing the death toll over two days of trouble to nine, police and hospital sources here said, reports AFP.

Unidentified gunmen shot dead a policeman guarding a Shi'ite mosque in an eastern district today while an employee of the private welfare organisation, Edhi Trust, was gunned down in the city's central district, police said.

The Edhi volunteer was killed as he rushed to the site of a grenade blast near a Shi'ite Muslim mosque. The blast left a woman and her five children injured, hospital sources said.

Police sources said another man died overnight Saturday in clashes between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims. Unidentified gunmen opened fire at a Shi'ite mosque today injuring five, the sources said, adding that sporadic clashes and gunbattles continued overnight in various parts of the city.

An earlier AP report says: Gunmen attacked two Shi'ite mosques Sunday, killing a volunteer ambulance driver and injuring 13 others, including six children studying the Koran, Muslims' holy book.

Police in the southern port city of Karachi said they feared the attacks, following another deadly shooting of Shi'ite Muslims on Saturday, marked an escalation of sectarian violence. Six people were killed Saturday when gunmen fired on a bus killed with Shi'ite worshippers returning home from a mosque.

On Sunday, assailants on motorcycles tossed an explosive device into the Imam Bargha Haidri, a small crumbling cement mosque in Karachi's teeming central district, witnesses said.

The explosion injured a group of children, sitting in cross-legged on a dirt floor while studying the Quran, a

daily ritual for most Muslim children in Pakistan.

"Some of the children were in awful condition. It was terrible," said Anwar Kazmi, spokesman for the Edhi Welfare Trust, the operators of Pakistan's largest emergency services organisation.

An Edhi employee was shot and killed earlier Sunday when gunmen fired on his ambulances as he tried to assist the victims of another shooting at the Imam Bargha Jafria Shi'ite mosque.

Seven people were injured in that attack.

"They are firing at our ambulances. No one seems to be able to guarantee our safety," said Kazmi.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attacks, and police have refused to speculate.

Shi'ite groups have blamed the attacks on their Sunni rivals.

Pakistan's majority Sunni

Muslims and the minority Shi'ite Muslims generally coexist peacefully in Pakistan. But in recent years dozens of small, militant religious groups have sprung up, and they often clash.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has accused her rightist opposition of encouraging sectarian violence, a charge, they deny.

Army and intelligence sources believe Pakistan's hostile neighbour India is behind the sectarian violence. Pakistan and India routinely accuse each other of masterminding terrorist acts.

The unfriendly neighbours have fought three wars since the subcontinent gained its independence from Britain in 1947.

Officials said thousands of police and heavily armed soldiers are patrolling Karachi's trouble areas, particularly eastern and central parts of the city, to prevent more violence.

Strike observed in Kashmir: 19 killed

SRINAGAR, July 24: At least 19 people, mostly Muslim separatists, have been killed in gunbattles with government security forces in Kashmir, police said today, reports Reuters.

They said at least five separatists were killed on Saturday in an encounter with the paramilitary border security force in Srinagar, summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir state.

Elsewhere in the Kashmir valley 14 people, half of them militants, were killed during gunbattles with the security forces, police said. They said three bodies were recovered from Baramulla area, but no other details were available.

Renewed attack on Bosnia

SARAJEVO, July 24: Tensions rose in Bosnia today after towns and civilians came under renewed fire following a setback in international peace efforts to end the 27-month old war in the battered republic, reports Reuters.

US and German officials on Saturday made fresh appeals to Bosnia's Serbs to accept the latest Bosnian peace plan and played down differences with Russia over the international response to its rejection.

The security forces late on Saturday arrested Jamal ur-Rehman, a senior leader and supreme commander of the pro-Pakistan Jihad force in Srinagar, officials said.

Kashmir valley observed a strike on Sunday called by the Jihad force to show solidarity with their arrested leader. Shops and businesses remained closed.

Police and hospital sources say more than 16,000 people have died in the four-year old rebellion against predominantly Hindu India's rule of Jammu and Kashmir.

BRIEFLY

Iran demands Iraq's explanation: Iran has demanded that Iraq explain the circumstances in which two leading Shi'ite Muslim clerics were killed in a highway accident there, the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported Sunday. Reuters says from Nicosia.

It said the Iraqi charge d'affaires in Tehran was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Saturday and handed a note voicing concern "about the hard conditions of Iranian nationals in Iraq" and Demanding an explanation of the accident.

IRNA said cleric Mohammad Taqi al-Khoei and Mohammad Amin Khalkhali, Khalkhali's seven-year-old son Saeed and their driver died in a collision with a truck on Thursday night.

427 Indians die of gastro-enteritis: At least 427 people in India's Uttar Pradesh state have been killed by gastro-enteritis in less than a week, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, Reuters reports from New Delhi.

A committee has been set up to monitor the situation and senior health officials asked to visit the affected areas to help speed up the treatment and implement preventive measures.

The news agency said the latest cases were reported from Allahabad, a Hindu holy city at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers and nearby Varanasi. Deaths have also been reported in several other districts.

2 Americans die in Aden blast: Two American men were killed on the outskirts of this war-ravaged city when their vehicle hit a mine left over from a two-month civil war, sources said Sunday, AP reports from Aden.

US Embassy officials in the capital, Sanaa, were not immediately available for comment.

If confirmed, the deaths would be the first known war-related casualties of foreigners. Thousands of foreigners were evacuated after north-south hostilities broke out on May 4.

Blair ahead in opinion poll: Newly-elected Labour opposition leader Tony Blair would make the best prime minister for Britain, according to a poll in the generally pro-Conservative Sunday Telegraph, AFP reports from London.

Blair was picked as the top man for the job by 61 per cent of the sample of 752 people questioned by the pollsters.

That was more than double the vote for current Conservative Premier John Major who got 23 per cent.

Nine per cent backed neither, and eight per cent did not know.

Lanka to compensate police victims: The Supreme Court has ordered a 3,062 dollar compensation to three suspects who were tortured in police custody, a local newspaper reported Sunday, AP says from Colombo.

Two of them had four teeth pulled out by policemen, the court was told. They were arrested for allegedly committing robbery and arson and kept by the police for 10 days in 1990, the Sunday Times reported.

Nigerian leader reappears: The missing leader of a strike by oil workers reappeared on Saturday saying he had been in hiding, AP reports from Lagos.

Frank Kokori, general-secretary of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, who was rumoured to have been detained by security agents, showed up at the Nigeria Labour Congress secretariat in the company of other union executives.

Union and government officials have held two meetings on the 2 and half week-old oil workers strike that has hit Nigeria's economy and tripped business as fuel grows more scarce.

10 soldiers killed in Colombia: Colombian Marxist guerrillas attacked an army engineers' camp in northern Antioquia Province, killing at least 10 soldiers and wounding six others, an army official said on Saturday, Reuters reports from Bogota.

The rebels launched the dawn raid on the camp near Dabeiba, about 245 miles (400 km) northeast of Bogota, he said. The engineers were building a highway near the town.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were suspected in that raid, the official said, adding, at least four soldiers were missing after the assault.

Ousted Gambian president for talks with rebels

BANJUL, July 24: Gambia's ousted president sat aboard a US warship with one of his wives and 14 of his children today hoping to negotiate with the young officers who overthrew him in a bloodless coup, reports Reuters.

The capital Banjul was calm but tourists have been advised to stay in their hotels. An overnight curfew was in force from 7 pm to 7 am.

Young army officers on Saturday announced a coup against veteran President Sir Dawda Jawara after what began as a rampage through Banjul on Friday by soldiers demanding back pay.

Jawara, one of his two wives and about 14 of his 19 children were sheltering on a US warship in Banjul harbour with the finance and justice ministers and the inspector general of police, officials said.

Jawara told the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that the mutineers' aims were not yet clear and he hoped their grievances could be resolved peacefully.

Aid workers fear famine in Rwanda after refugees return

GOMA, Zaire, July 24: Already overwhelmed by what could be the worst refugee drama ever, aid workers fear they cannot avert a new calamity when Rwandans eventually go home: famine, reports AP.

A bumper crop of sorghum is ready now, but hardly anyone is left to bring it in. Unless farmers plant beans and soya by September, there will be no new food in January.

"We will have to feed all of Rwanda for eight months if things don't get balanced," said Jean-Francois Gascon, a UN consultant brought in to find a solution. "It is catastrophic."

Before the holocaust, Rwanda was a small but lush land by the lakes of Central Africa, densely populated with perhaps 8 million inhabitants.

Suddenly, families fled their fields, just as the grain ripened. Seeds and tools were lost. Distribution systems collapsed.

"Can you imagine how much seed we have to get out to people — if there are people



Yuri Nakamura, 37, second daughter of Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama smiles before she leaves for Seoul on Saturday at the Tokyo International Airport. She will accompany her father on his first official visit to South Korea. Murayama's wife Yoshi suffers from chronic back pain and is mostly confined to the family home in Chiyomachi, so Yuri will take on the role of Japan's "First Lady". — AFP photo

S Arabia helped Iraq develop N-arms?

LONDON, July 24: Saudi Arabia helped the Iraqi regime of President Saddam Hussein to finance the development of nuclear weapons, Britain's Sunday Times reported, says AFP.

Naming its source as Mohammed Abdulla Al-Khilewi, a Saudi diplomat who has reportedly defected and sought asylum in the United States, the paper said Riyadh gave Baghdad financial aid worth five billion dollars under a secret agreement.

In return, the Iraqis agreed to share their nuclear technology with the Saudis. The paper said negotiations to that effect began in 1985, when Iraq was embroiled in a drawn-out war with Iran, and only stopped with the 1991 Gulf War after Iraq invaded Kuwait.

The report added that the Saudis had started up a programme as early as 1975 to build the atomic bomb, opening a secret research centre in 1975 in a military complex near Al Sulayyah.

The paper said it has seen the minutes of secret meetings between military officials from both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the desert in 1989, just a year before Iraq marched into Kuwait, proving Riyadh's financing of Baghdad's nuclear programme.

The Sunday Times says the documents show the Saudis provided Iraq with specialised equipment it could not obtain on its own.

Al-Khilewi said last month he had written a letter on May 17 to Crown Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz and other ranking Saudi officials to express his opposition to the regime, after unearthing secret documents showing hard evidence of serious human rights violations in Saudi Arabia.

The former diplomat, who is listed by the United Nations as First Secretary to the Saudi UN mission, said the country's secret services had made threats on his and his family's lives after he sent the letter.

The Sunday Times said US secret services warned Al-Khilewi last Friday that attempts were underway to kidnap and repatriate him.

Al-Khilewi further said he is in possession of some 13,000 documents showing the existence of a treaty signed by the Saudi leadership in 1970 with Pakistan assuring Riyadh of Islamabad's protection if the Saudis were attacked by a nuclear power. Pakistan itself has the bomb.

UN installs 50 cameras in Iraq to monitor missiles

MANAMA, July 24: UN arms inspectors have set up 50 monitoring cameras and scores of sensors across Iraq in a unique operation to forestall attempts by Baghdad to acquire long-range missiles, reports AP.

"Nothing comes close to it. It covers an entire country," said Dr Guy Martelle, whose 20 member multinational team of experts installed the system this month. "It is one of a kind, the largest and first of its kind in the world... it is phenomenal."

The system will be field-tested next month and UN Special Commission Chairman Rolf Ekeus is expected to declare its operation in September, he said.

Martelle, an American, spoke to reporters in Bahrain at the regional headquarters of the UN special commission, which is charged with ensuring Iraq give up its weapons of mass destruction.

The system was tailored specifically for Iraq by a UN member nation, he said, without identifying the country.

The United States has contributed most of the experts to the operation that was launched in 1991 when a ceasefire ended the Gulf War. A US-LED multinational force took only 43 days to push Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, ending their seven month occupation.

Under terms of the cease fire, Iraq was forbidden to possess weapons of mass destruction. UN inspectors have enforced the prohibition by tracking down and dismantling Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programme, as well as its long-range missiles.

The cease-fire agreement prohibits Baghdad from possessing or developing missiles with a range of 150 kilometers (93 miles) or more. But it is permitted to possess and develop medium and short range missiles.

Iraq fired scores of long range missiles, Scuds and a few homemade variations, at Iran during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and then turned them

against Saudi Arabia and Israel during the Gulf War.

Having destroyed Iraq's arsenal, the UN Special Commission now is installing a long-term monitoring system to prevent Iraq from acquiring more weapons of mass destruction.

Martelle said the grid laid by his team used 20 tons of equipment, including cameras that were installed at 15 sites, 66,000 yards (meters) of cables, scores of sensors and a 94-meter (308-foot) mast.

The sites deal with missiles, missile production, developing, testing, maintenance and research.

The grid hub is at the former Canal Hotel in the heart of Baghdad, now converted into the "Baghdad Monitoring Center." A fairly sophisticated electronic security system is also in place.

Nuclear weapons experts have installed closed-circuit video surveillance systems at two engineering plants near Baghdad, Martelle said.

ROK publisher to face probe for meeting Jr Kim

SEOUL, July 24: South Korean prosecutors said today that a newspaper publisher who recently visited communist North Korea would face investigation upon his return to Seoul, reports Reuters.

Bo Hi Pak, publisher of the Segye Times newspaper, was in Pyongyang for an 11-day trip, during which he had a rare meeting with Kim Jong-Il, eldest son of "great leader" Kim Il-Sung who died on July 8.

The younger Kim, known as the "dear leader" to his subjects was groomed for years to succeed his father in the communist world's first dynastic succession. He is believed to have now taken control of the country following his father's death.

"When Pak arrives in Seoul, we will have to investigate the situation," an official at the Seoul prosecutors office said.

South Korea's strict national security laws ban all contacts with or support for the Stalinist state. The maximum penalty for violating the law is death, but the sentence is normally commuted.

Off the Record

Crackdown on dog ownership

BEIJING: Authorities in the eastern Chinese city of Nanjing have killed 2,271 dogs in an intensive three-week clampdown on illegal ownership of such pets, the health news reported on Sunday, says AFP.

The newspaper said that a surge in dog ownership had interfered with people's lives and posed serious health hazards, with 2,322 residents reporting being injured by dogs and three dying from bites from rabid canines between January and May.

The clampdown has greatly improved the situation, with dog barking rarely heard in the Jiangsu provincial capital now, it said.

Deputy Police Director Lu Qingli said the authorities would allow individuals with suitable living conditions to own small, expensive pedigree dogs that did not disturb the peace or threaten the environment, but would strictly control the overall number of dogs in the city.

The move comes amid growing official calls nationwide for a crackdown on dog ownership.

The practice, which all-but disappeared after 1949, when it was condemned as bourgeois, has during the past decade of economic reforms become popular despite a ban in many places.

For wealthy couples in Chinese cities, owning a pedigree dog has become an important status symbol.

The Guangming Daily reported earlier this month that three were now as many as 100 million dogs in China — or one for every 12 of the country's 1.2 billion population.

Drink tea, keep away cancer

LONDON: US scientists have found evidence that drinking tea regularly may help to prevent certain kinds of cancer, the Sunday Times reported, says AFP.

The scientists said a substance in the leaves of green and black tea prevented the spread of cancer by blocking cancer-causing agents in the bloodstream originating from eating cooked meats and fish, the weekly reported Sunday.

Doctors in several centres are experimenting with mice and rats and have shown that cancers artificially induced in the laboratory animals could be "markedly reduced" by giving them tea.

Dr John Weisburger, director emeritus of the American Health Foundation, said: "It is my impression that if you drink six cups of tea a day it will protect you against cancer."

Weisburger, who has 40 years' experience in cancer research, said his studies showed the risk to rats of contracting cancer of the breast, colon and pancreas from cancer-causing agents commonly found in cooked meats and fish was significantly reduced by doses of tea given in the same concentrations as drunk by humans.

But the protective effects were lessened if milk was added to the tea, or if the leaf chemicals were altered at too high a temperature, he said.

All in the Middle Earth

MOSCOW: It might seem that Russia has had enough battles and plenty of heroes, villains and fools, reports AP.

But Russian fans of English fantasy author J R R Tolkien say they're just getting going. They gather by the dozens each week at twilight in a wooded park called Neskuchny Sad, or Pleasure Gardens, overlooking the Moscow River.

"We have no sources, few books. We're just starting out, like it probably was in America 20 or 30 years ago," said Konstantin Asmolov a regular at the gatherings.

"We need Dungeons and Dragons humanitarian aid," he said, lamenting that the Tolkien-style fantasy game has yet to appear in Russian.

Many of the Tolkien devotees wear capes and daggers, and a handful in their teens and 20s lunge at each other with homemade swords and spears, slipping and sliding in the mud.

Only occasionally does the real world intrude — the faraway sound of car horns on Lenin Prospect.

Tolkien's imaginary universe, Middle Earth, inspires such dress-up games in many places, but he is a relatively recent obsession for Russians. The Lord of the Rings trilogy, published in the West in 1954-55, wasn't published in Russia until 1982.

There are a few groups of "Tolkienists" in Moscow, centered on Moscow State University. Many prefer to be called "Tolkienuti," which carries a hint of craziness.

Fundamentalist group in Algeria to stop killings

ALGIERS, July 24: A group which kidnapped two Arab ambassadors has offered to call a halt to the killings of foreigners in Algeria in exchange for the release of one of its leaders, the freed Yemeni Ambassador Qassem Askar, Jebrane said, reports AFP.

The group made the offer to Algeria's military-backed authorities in a message handed to the envoy when he and his Omani counterpart, Hillaal al-Siyabi, were released last week, Jebrane told the El Watan newspaper in an interview on Sunday.

Both diplomats were in good health and had returned to their countries, the official news agencies in Yemen and Oman said on Saturday.

The kidnappers — whom Jebrane said were from the Islamic armed group — want the release of Abdelhak Layada, who is currently faces a death sentence, Jebrane said.



US soldiers arrive at Goma Airport on Saturday where they came to establish the logistics for a US humanitarian mission. — AFP photo