

BRIEFLY

Malaysia deports 9 Chinese: Malaysia was reported yesterday to have sent home nine Chinese illegal immigrants from a group of 20 who had doused themselves with kerosene and threatened to set themselves on fire if deported, AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

The nine, including two women and three children, left for Guangzhou on a Malaysia Airlines flight on Sunday while their 11 compatriots were sent to a Kuala Lumpur jail, local news reports said.

"We were instructed by police and immigration authorities to detain the 11 in prison, they are not convicted of any crime and are being detained temporarily to await deportation," Malaysian prisons chief Zaman Khan Rahim Khan was quoted as saying.

Thai PM for release of Suu Kyi:

Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai yesterday urged Myanmar to release detained Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi as the key to solving many of the isolated country's political and economic problems, Reports reports from Bangkok.

Chuan made the recommendation in talks with Myanmar Foreign Minister Ohn Gya, who is in Bangkok as the guest of Thailand at a ministerial meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"Settle the question of Aung San Suu Kyi first, then Myanmar will have time to concentrate on developing the democratic process and the economy," Thai government spokesman Abhisit Vejjajiva quoted Chuan as telling Ohn Gya.

LA shootout leaves 3 dead: A gunman opened fire at the birthday party of a 3-year-old girl, killing two people before he was shot to death, AP reports from Los Angeles.

About 60 people attended the party on Saturday night in the front yard of a Los Angeles home. "Several people were dancing and small children were running around, so it's very lucky that no one else got shot," said police Detective Eric Campos.

Police believe the shootout was the result of an ongoing dispute but they did not know what started the argument, Campos said the shooting wasn't believed to be gang-related.

35 more die in Chinese floods: Floods from torrential rain have killed 35 people in south China, but farmers in other parts of the country are battling to save their crops from drought, an official newspaper said on Monday, AP reports from Beijing.

The rains last week in Guangxi province on the border with Vietnam also ruined 100,000 tons of grain that was ready for harvest, the China Daily said.

Among the most severely affected areas was Qinzhou city on Guangxi's south coast, where 22 died in week-long rains, the newspaper said. It did not give details on the other deaths.

Rally for peace in Lima: Around 40,000 people took part on Sunday in a march for peace to repudiate a 1992 guerrilla bombing in Peru's capital and last week's attack against Argentina's main Jewish community centre, Reuter reports from Lima.

Peruvian religious and political leaders and some 600 members of the local Jewish community joined the march through the elegant suburb of Miraflores marking the third anniversary of a guerrilla attack that killed 25 people.

The demonstration was also called to protest against the bombing last Monday of a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires where at least 59 people were killed.

Forest fires in Canada: A rash of forest fires raged across Canada's westernmost province on Sunday and officials feared that forecasted lightning storms could ignite more, Reuter reports from Vancouver.

The British Columbia Forest Service said 129 different fires were burning in the province with a total area of 8,113 acres (3,285 hectares). No towns or major parks were in immediate danger but a shift in wind patterns could force evacuation of some rural residents and small communities.

Lightning sparked two fires near the town of Princeton about 120 miles (200 km) east of Vancouver and more lightning storms forecast for Sunday night raised fears that the situation could worsen.

Israel cuts forces in West Bank:

Israel recently cut its forces in the West Bank even though the army says violence has increased in the occupied territories since PLO chief Yasser Arafat arrived in Gaza on July 1, Israeli newspapers said Monday, AP reports from Jerusalem.

Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Amnon Shahak told the weekly Cabinet meeting Sunday that riots and shooting incidents have risen, Haaretz said.

The latest victim was policeman Sgt. Jai. Yitzhak Atlas, 25, who died early Monday of wounds suffered when a Palestinian policeman shot him during a July 17 riot at the Erez crossing from Gaza to Israel.

Quake rocks Indonesia:

An earthquake measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale rocked Indonesia's Bengkulu Province but there were no reports of casualties or damage, the meteorological and geophysical agency said yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

The quake was centred 50 km (30 miles) southeast of Bengkulu town on the western side of Sumatra island. It occurred at 5:59 pm on Sunday (1059 GMT).

Yemen to free 4000 POWs

SANAA, July 25: The government announced today the release of around 4,000 prisoners who were captured in Yemen's two-month civil war, reports AFP.

"This decision by President Ali Abdullah Saleh shows he does not differentiate between the people of unified Yemen," Defence Minister Abdel Rubbu Monsur Hadi told hundreds of POWs shown on television.

The prisoners had backed Saleh's southern rival Ali Salem Al-Baid, who declared a breakaway state after war broke out in May 5. The war ended July 7 as key southern

cities fell and southern leaders fled the country.

"These people will be given a two-week leave to visit their families," the Defence Minister told prisoners shown at the Sanaa Military Academy.

The minister said the group benefitted from a general amnesty declared by Saleh on May 24 but which excluded Baid and 15 close colleagues.

"Officers will be given 5,000 riyals (416 dollars), soldiers will be given 3,000 riyals (250 dollars) and civilians will be given 2,000 riyals (166 dollars)," he said.

At a special meeting in this small borderland town in the Irish Republic, Sinn Fein delegates giving the party's first formal reply to the joint peace declaration said it did not offer enough and was contradictory, but could be a first step.

"We are all agreed that the declaration is a step, not a solution, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams told delegates.

Sinn Fein rejects peace plan

LETTERKENNY, Ireland, July 25: Britain and Ireland pondered their next step after the IRA's political wing Sinn Fein largely rejected an Anglo-Irish blueprint for peace in Northern Ireland, reports Reuter.

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India seeks Bhutan's permission to pursue Bodo rebels

GAUHATI, July 25: Army commandos Monday scoured the jungles in northeastern India for armed Bodo tribesmen who massacred at least 60 Muslim settlers in a refugee camp.

The government in New Delhi has asked neighbouring Bhutan for permission to pursue tribal guerrillas across the border, the federal Internal Security Minister, Rajesh Pilot, told the Associated Press.

About 400 Indian troops were searching for militants from the outlawed Bodo Security Force who raided a camp Sunday where Muslims had sought shelter from ethnic violence, said Hiteswar Saikia, the Chief Minister of the state of Assam.

The insurgents set fire to a school where about 5,000 Muslim migrants were sleeping. The attackers fired with

light machine guns and AK-47 assault rifles on fleeing men, women and children. Three rebels also were killed when security guards returned fire, police said.

The ethnic riots erupted earlier this month for the fourth time since last October. Sunday's killings brought the official death toll in the latest round to more than 90, including seven policemen killed in a land mine explosion two weeks ago.

The Bodos say their ancient culture is threatened by Muslim immigrants. Under a 17-month-old agreement, areas with a tribal majority were to be administered by an autonomous council of elected Bodo officials.

But more than 500 villages where the Bodos claimed to have a majority were found to have more Muslims, Muslim

leaders accuse the Bodos of trying to 'cleanse' their villages of Muslims, most of whom had migrated from Bangladesh years ago.

At least 1,000 people have been killed in the last six years of insurrection.

AFP reports: "The army is in the area," a spokesman for the Assam state governments said here. "But there is a lot of tension and fear. We are urging the (Camp) inmates not to move out."

The spokesman said fresh paramilitary contingents from New Delhi were on the way to Assam to beef up security.

Distraught victims poured out their woe to three ministers, including Minister of State for Home Affairs Rajesh Pilot, who visited the area on Sunday.

Zahiruddin, a 26-year-old Muslim told reporters that the

Bodo gunmen began firing "from all directions."

"The 10 policemen guarding us tried to fight back but were outnumbered," he said. They ran away.

"Terror-stricken people started running in all directions", he said. People were screaming, there was total chaos.

"There was smoke and fire everywhere," he said. "I, my wife and children huddled in a corner and managed to save our lives. We later crawled to the outer periphery of the camp. Perhaps they (Bodos) left us for dead."

In New Delhi, Pilot, who cancelled a trip to Kashmir to rush to Assam after hearing of the cold-blooded attack, vowed to wage a "counter-offensive" against the BSF, which is fighting to set up a Bodo homeland in the state.

Closed door session on Bosnia begins

MOSCOW, July 25: High-ranking diplomats from Russia, the United States, Britain, Germany and France met Monday in closed session to discuss the Bosnian Serbs' response to the international community's peace plan, reports AP.

Representatives of the United Nations and the European Union also attended the talks, being held at an undisclosed location, a Foreign

Ministry spokesman said.

Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told the ITAR-Tass news agency that the collapse of the peace plan could have catastrophic consequences. He said Monday's meeting of the contact group was studying additional measures to implement the plan to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Ivanov said the offer was "a balanced plan that reflects the interests of all the sides. It was approved at the Naples summit, and it would hardly be expedient to deviate from it."

He said it was time to "concentrate our efforts on achieving its implementation."

The Interfax news agency said the contact group was looking at the Bosnian Serbs' 'vague response' to the plan and would set an agenda for the next ministerial-level meeting on the Bosnian crisis to be held in Geneva July 30.

Russia, a traditional Serb ally, is seen as the best hope for getting the plan, a map dividing Bosnia-Herzegovina, accepted.

The Serbs say that the proposed map was a basis for further talks, but other issues like Sarajevo and constitutional agreements also needed to be discussed.

The map would give the Muslim-Croat federation 51 per cent of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosnian Serbs, who control about 70 per cent of the land, would get 49 per cent under the plan.

Egyptian govt to take control of all mosques

CAIRO, July 25: Egypt's government will place all of the country's mosques under its control by the end of the year as part of a drive against Muslim fundamentalism, a semi-official newspaper reported today, says AFP.

"The state is not facing groups that carry true religion, but gangs carrying weapons under the cover of religion to implement their plans aimed at hitting Egypt's stability," AL-Ahram quoted Religious Affairs Minister Mohammed Ali Mahgoub as saying.

Mahgoub was speaking to teenagers at a summer camp near the Egyptian coastal city of Alexandria.

Mahgoub said 70 per cent of Egypt's 170,000 mosques were already under government control.



The Texaco oil refinery at Milford Haven, West Wales in Britain, is in flames on Sunday. The refinery was still burning yesterday, a day after it was rocked by a powerful explosion which wounded 26, local emergency services said.

— AFP photo

Rebels attack Yangon troops

BANGKOK, July 25: Fighting between ethnic minority rebels and Myanmar troops has erupted, while several thousand refugees continued to cover on monsoon-swept hill-sides just inside Thailand, refugee sources said on Monday, reports AP.

The sources, who demanded anonymity, said clashes were taking place between Myanmar units and guerrillas of the Karen and Mon ethnic minorities not far from a refugee camp attacked by the Myanmar last week.

The guerrillas had received orders to step up their attacks against the Myanmar 62nd battalion which had stormed the Hloekhani Camp and fighting was expected to escalate, the sources said.

Driven from the camp astride the Thai-Myanmar border, some 3,500 Mon refugees were seeking temporary asylum just inside Thailand's western province of Kanchanaburi. They were living in crude shelters on hillside turned to mud by daily downpours, the sources said.

The attack has puzzled observers at a major ongoing meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) here to which Myanmar Foreign Minister Ohn Gya received an unprecedented invitation.

While photographs of

burned down refugee houses and fleeing refugees appear in Bangkok newspapers, the Myanmar delegation tries to refurbish its tarnished international image and ASEAN, especially Thailand, emphasises improvements in Myanmar's political situation.

Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines are also ASEAN members.

Myanmar's military government has been widely condemned for crushing its pro-

democracy opponents and continued brutality against ethnic minority groups, which have long sought autonomy from the central government.

Several theories have emerged about the attack which has not been officially reported by Myanmar.

The Mon, along with the Karen, are the last two major ethnic minorities that have continued to fight the central government and the strike may have been a form of pressure to come to the negotiating table.

The Mon National Refugee Committee, which is aiding the refugees, has said that about 6,000 people have fled into Thailand but the refugee sources say the number is closer to 3,500.

The French group, Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), has been digging temporary wells and a consortium of Christian relief agencies is bringing in food and plastic sheeting for shelter.

Thailand's Border Patrol Police has rushed in about 100 troops into the area. The Mons were moved to Hloekhani Camp about four months ago by Thai authorities from sites deeper inside Thailand despite fears by the refugees that they would be vulnerable to attack by the Myanmar army.

Unconfirmed reports said that Jawa's two wives, other family members and several Cabinet ministers were also on board the USS La Moure County. It was unclear Monday whether any of them had actually left the vessel.

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In 1974, an Arab summit conference stripped Hussein of the authority to speak for the Palestinians and made the Palestine Liberation Organisation their sole representative.

Hussein honoured the decision, refusing US and Israeli calls to make peace with Israel on behalf of the Palestinians. But he did hold secret talks with Israeli leaders, several times flying his own helicopter to clandestine meetings.

In 1988, Hussein formally ended a long power struggle

Ousted Gambian president gets asylum in Senegal

DAKAR, Senegal, July 25: Senegal has granted political asylum to the president of neighbouring Gambia, overthrown by soldiers in a bloodless coup after 29 years in power, reports AP.

A US warship brought Gambian President Dawda Jawara to Dakar late Sunday as the government announced asylum for Jawara and his family for humanitarian reasons.

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Delhi's bid to acquire latest Russian jets

MOSCOW, July 25: A senior military delegation from India arrived in Moscow today for talks on cooperation with Russia and possible aircraft purchases, Itar-Tass news agency said, reports Reuter.

It said the delegation, led by Air Force Commander-in-Chief S K Kaul, would meet senior Defence Ministry and arms industry officials during the one-week visit and examine the latest models of Russian combat aircraft.

"He (Kaul) is also likely to negotiate purchases of Mig-29 fighter-bombers and SU-30 multi-purpose fighters," it said.

Tass said India may consider buying a licence for production of the SU-30 fighters.

The two sides will also discuss modernisation of Mig-21 fighters currently in service with the Indian Air Force and creation of a joint Russian-Indian aircraft venture, Tass

said, quoting an Indian embassy official.

Russia and India agreed to step up military cooperation in a joint declaration signed by President Boris Yeltsin, and Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao during a visit by the latter to Moscow last month.

Publisher's licence cancelled for visiting DPRK

SEOUL, July 25: South Korea today cancelled the licence of a South Korean newspaper publisher apparently in retaliation for travelling to North Korea without authorisation, reports AFP.

The Information Ministry said that Pak Bo-Hi's licence as publisher of the Segye Times and six other sister periodicals was cancelled because he has a US resident permit.

Off the Record

Diana to go to court

LONDON: Princess Diana has decided to go to court against a man who photographed her exercising in a gym and the newspaper that published the photos, reports AP.

Anthony Julius, head of litigation at the law firm Mishcon de Reya, said Diana was suing to recover the profits made by Bryce Taylor, the former gym owner who took the pictures, and the Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror newspapers.

The case is scheduled to be heard on February 13, Julius said, and Diana is prepared to testify.

"If it can be shown that the Mirror and Sunday Mirror's circulation went up by a very considerable margin over the two days when those photographs were reproduced it could be a seven-figure sum," in excess of 1.5 million dollars, he said.

Taylor gave the princess a written pledge when she joined the LA Fitness Club that her privacy would be protected. He obtained photographs of her, exercising in cycling shorts and leotard, by hiding a camera in a ceiling.

Diana's lawyers went to court after the pictures were published in November, seeking to block any further publication.

Hemingway Look-alike

KEY WEST: After five years of trying, a bar manager won the Ernest Hemingway Look-alike contest — thanks to a beard, a wool sweater and a little bit of a paunch, reports AP.

John Petersen beat out 82 other Hemingway wannabes on Saturday to claim a one-week stay at a local resort during next year's festival, a 100 dollars tab at Sloppy Joe's Bar, a box of Hemingway cigars, five cases of beer and a front-end alignment for his car.

He said he gained weight and let his beard grow in order to win. He also wore a cream-coloured wool turtleneck sweater.

"I'll be back every year now as a judge, but at least I don't have to wear the sweater any more," Petersen said.

The Hemingway Days celebration, which ended Sunday, was created 14 years ago to honour the Pulitzer Prize-winning author who lived on the island for years.

Don't go shopping topless

FRANCE: Tourists have been ordered to put on their clothes when they leave the beach to go shopping in this French Riviera resort, reports AFP.

The local council here said in a by-law that it will fine tourists wandering about half-naked or wearing over-skimpy swimwear.

Neighbouring Saint-Maxime adopted a similar by-law "to preserve the public peace and ensure a minimum of decency is respected."

But both municipalities said a certain amount of nudity would be tolerated close to the beach.

Riot in German jail

KASSEL, Germany, July 25: Police commandos seized 39 mutinous prisoners, most of them Algerians awaiting deportation, and freed their hostage Monday when the inmates tried to board the bus they demanded, authorities said, reports AP.

There were no reports of casualties in the raid at Kassel's jail for inmates in investigative custody.

The rioters had taken the 39-year-old guard hostage on Sunday morning, threatening him with what turned out to be a fake bomb.

Later in the day, they set a fire that was extinguished without any apparent injuries.

Shortly afterward, police attempted a raid to free the guard but called it off after rebellious inmates threatened to kill the guard.

Some 135 inmates not involved in the revolt left the jail Sunday evening.

The bus was brought to the red brick jail late Sunday. In negotiations early Monday, the rioters demanded to be moved in the bus to a similar jail in Wiesbaden, Germany.

King Hussein's quest for peace culminates with US summit

AMMAN, July 25: King Hussein has survived assassination attempts, failed coups and defeat in war during his 41-year tenure in the tempest of Middle East politics, reports AP.

But the British-educated monarch has yet to conquer the greatest challenge inherited with his throne: reaching peace with Israel and settling the future of Palestinian refugees who make up roughly two-thirds of Jordan's 3.9 million people.

Monday's meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the White House could be a key step in the search for an Arab-Israeli settlement after nearly a half-century of con-

lict.

Hussein's grandfather, Abdullah, was assassinated in 1951 after annexing the West Bank and trying to make peace with Israel, but Hussein carried on his pro-Western policies.

A low ebb came in the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Israel captured the fertile West Bank of the Jordan River and the Arab half of Jerusalem, including Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam.

Hussein's outgunned military was devastated and the country was flooded with Palestinian refugees.

In the "Black September" war of 1970, Hussein sent troops to crush Palestinian

guerrillas who had escaped government control. Some urged Hussein's overthrow. Thousands of Palestinians were killed or injured in the crack-down.

In 1974, an Arab summit conference stripped Hussein of the authority to speak for the Palestinians and made the Palestine Liberation Organisation their sole representative.

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King Hussein

and renounced his claim to the West Bank in favour of the PLO, further distancing himself from US and Israeli plans to make peace with Jordan, not the Palestinians.

Hussein avoided a direct role in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, though he sent troops to assist Syrian forces.

Hussein, like nearly all other Arab leaders, opposed the US-mediated Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel and the resulting 1979 peace treaty.

But in the following years, he pushed further than any other Arab leader in exploring US efforts to mediate a broader Arab-Israeli peace.

He tried to help break the

stalemate in 1984 by restoring relations with Egypt, ending an Arab diplomatic embargo. It paved the way for other states to bring Egypt back into the Arab mainstream.

The Gulf War against Iraq, in which Hussein was widely perceived as pro-Iraq, isolated his resource-poor Kingdom politically and economically.

His former Arab allies in the oil-rich Gulf still give him the cold shoulder, leaving his country with virtually no regional backing.

But he returned to US favour through his enthusiastic participation in the American-sponsored Middle East peace process launched in October 1991.

Dawn-to-dusk curfew in Nigerian town