

BRIEFLY



US and Kuwaiti soldiers watch the joint exercises on Tuesday on the fourth anniversary of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The joint US-Kuwait forces held a live fire exercise in the Adri al-Khilla border zone (50km from the Iraqi border). — AFP photo

Kuwait to buy Russian arms: Kuwait, which on Tuesday hosted a thunderous US military exercise on the fourth anniversary of Iraq's invasion, said it would soon sign an agreement to buy Russian weapons, the Kuwaiti news agency Kuna reported. Reuter says from Dubai.

Kuna said Defence Minister Sheikh Ahmad Hamoud Al-Sabah made the announcement at the end of the joint military exercise with the US forces in the Kuwaiti desert.

Pope to visit former Y'slavia: Pope John Paul II will make his first visit to the former Yugoslavia next month, stopping in Croatia and also possibly in war-torn Sarajevo if security conditions allow, the Vatican announced Wednesday. AP reports from Vatican City.

An advance team was expected in Sarajevo later this week to study the possibility of a stop in the Bosnian city.

Benazir's gift for Kim Jong: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has presented a gift to Kim Jong-il, heir-apparent to the late North Korean President Kim Il-Sung, a North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) report said on Tuesday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

"Comrade Kim Jong-il, the dear leader of our party and people, received a gift from Benazir Bhutto," the KCNA report monitored here said.

2 hurt in Lankan polls violence: Police fired gunshots in the air on Tuesday to disperse ruling party workers who hurled rocks at an opposition election meeting in central Sri Lanka and injured two people, police said. AP reports from Colombo.

But officials of the opposition group, the People's Alliance, said at least eight people were injured in the attack at Hasalaka in the Kandy district.

Algerian troops kill 20 rebels: Algerian security forces killed 20 Muslim militants in a three-day battle near Skikda, 225 miles east of Algiers, while berber villagers fought off and wounded others who raided their community in the Kabylie region, official Algerian sources said on Tuesday, reports Reuter from Tunis.

The Algerian news agency APS, quoting a security statement, said 20 fundamentalists armed with shotguns were killed by security forces during three days of fighting near Skikda which ended at the weekend.

Russia launches new satellite: Russia launched a new military satellite Wednesday from its northern Plesetsk cosmodrome, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported. AP reports from Moscow.

The Cosmos-2285 satellite was sent into orbit "in the interests of the Defense Ministry," said a statement by the Russian aerospace forces. There were no further details available.

Plesetsk, located 800 kilometres (500 miles) north of Moscow, is Russia's main militia space launching facility.

2 die as train, truck collide in Japan: A truck crashed into a passenger train in western Japan on Wednesday at a level crossing, killing the truck driver and one train passenger, police said. AP reports from Tokyo.

The first three cars of the train derailed and the front car fell into a rice field in the city of Sanda in Hyogo Prefecture (state), 435 kilometres (270 miles) west of Tokyo.

At least one person was injured, police said.

UN may keep sanctions on Libya: The Security Council is expected to keep sanctions on Libya, as it considers Tripoli has not met UN demands that it hand over two suspects in the 1988 Pan Am bombing over Scotland, Western diplomats said on Tuesday. AFP reports from United Nations.

The resolution that came into force in April 1992 provides for a flight ban and military embargo to which the Security Council added economic sanctions last December.

Confce against N-arms in Hiroshima: A four-day international conference against nuclear arms kicked off in the western Japanese city of Hiroshima on Wednesday calling for the eventual elimination of atomic weapons from the world. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Members of Japan's ruling coalition were to attend the conference.

The conference, sponsored by the Japan congress against atomic and hydrogen bombs, will discuss ways to enhance international treaties banning nuclear experiments and production of nuclear substances.

Brazil to buy Russian missiles: The Brazilian army will buy 112 surface-to-air missiles from Russia by the end of this year in accordance with a bilateral commercial cooperation agreement signed last year, reports Xinhua from Brasilia.

The acquisition of the weaponry meets a desire of the Brazilian army to update its ordinance, the local press said on Wednesday.

SA plans census of its population: South Africa plans to conduct a full census of its population — currently estimated at about 40 million — on March 7, 1996. Reuter reports from Cape Town.

Cabinet Minister Jay Naidoo said in reply to a parliamentary question that the census, the first under black majority rule, would cost an estimated 145 million rand (39 million dollars).

Cholera claims 6 in Russia: Cholera has killed six people in Russia's southern region of Dagestan and is spreading quickly, the Health Ministry said on Tuesday. Reuter reports from Moscow.

The ministry, quoted by the official Itar-Tass news agency, said 204 people were suffering from the disease and 115 others had been registered as carriers of the virus on Monday. The corresponding figures were 175 and 83.

6 ex-Kurdish deputies on trial: Six former Kurdish deputies ousted from parliament for supporting Kurdish separatism went on trial Wednesday on charges of treason. They could receive the death penalty. AP reports from Ankara.

Hatip Dicle, the chairman of the now defunct pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (DP), Ahmet Turk, Orhan Dogan, Sirri Sakik, Mahmut Alinak and Leyla Zana, the only female member of the group, have been in jail since March.

BJP submits protest letter to Sharma

Opposition steps up pressure on Rao over bank scam

NEW DELHI, Aug 3: Opposition parties today stepped up pressure on Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao over India's biggest financial scandal, as his government manoeuvred to defuse a political row, reports AFP.

Members of a centre-left coalition staged demonstrations at parliament after boycotting the legislature to protest Rao's handling of a 1.3 billion dollars bank scam, which has returned corruption to the political centre stage.

"Narasimha Rao quit, quit," they chanted, "punish the corrupt."

The opposition has accused Rao's administration of shield-

ing ministers and officials linked to the banking fraud and covering up corruption, a perennial issue in Indian politics.

Leaders of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) marched to the presidential palace and handed over a letter to President Shankar Dayal Sharma protesting the government's denial of responsibility in the scam.

"We will organise demonstrations, public meetings and processions to mobilise public opinion against corruption which has become the single dominant issue," BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee said before meeting Sharma.

In parliament, Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan said Rao's government was not interested in suppressing the findings of the Joint Parliamentary Commission (JPC) which probed the two-year-old securities scandal.

Chavan said the government had taken action on 109 of the 115 recommendations of the JPC, which investigated the securities fraud involving foreign and Indian banks unscrupulous bankers and stock brokers.

"If the government had committed any mistake in the report it was the duty of the

opposition to point these out," Chavan said in a statement seen as a conciliatory gesture to the incensed opposition to defuse the storm.

He was referring to the government action taken to report which rejected the findings of the parliamentary probe committee which had blamed administrative lapses for the market scam.

The government described as unfair and unwarranted the criticism the charge that it failed to detect and stop the swindle by brokers and bankers who connived to siphon off 1.3 billion dollars from banks to play the stock market.

"The government would take the issue to the people to explain to them that it had not been lacking in any way in taking action on the findings of the JPC," the home minister added.

Other Congress leaders meanwhile said they were hopeful of a solution to the crisis, triggered by the opposition decision on Tuesday to pull out of legislative committees and boycott the three remaining weeks of the parliamentary session.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vidya Charan Shukla said he was continuing "hectic" efforts to persuade opposition leaders to call off the boycott and return to parliament.

"We are in touch. I expect them to be back in a few days," Shukla told AFP.

Congress spokesman Vithal Gadgil said he was hopeful a formula would be worked out by mediators to resolve the political tangle.

Rao, 73, was seen by analysts to have handed ammunition to the opposition, which had been on the retreat since suffering reverses in state elections last November by bungling the response to the parliamentary probe findings.



Pakistan's former Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief Imtiaz Ahmad (L) waves as he entered the court for hearing on Tuesday. Ahmad, a retired army brigadier was taken into custody on July 24. He is accused of involvement in plot to topple the previous government of incumbent Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1989 by allegedly bribing deputies to back a no-confidence motion against her in the parliament. An unidentified security person in plainclothes is seen on his right.

Haitian politicians denounce possible US-led invasion

PROT-AU-PRINCE, Aug 3: Haitian politicians on Tuesday denounced a possible US-led invasion and urged find a political solution to the crisis, a call echoed in the United Nations by Venezuela and others, reports AFP.

In New York, UN representatives from several Latin American nations discussed on Tuesday a Venezuelan proposal for dialogue with Haitian leaders to avoid military intervention, diplomatic sources said.

The idea consists of sending a group of emissaries to Haiti to tell the military regime that they have been offered the last chance to leave peacefully," a Venezuelan diplomat said.

Representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela, as well as UN and organisation of American states mediator Dante Caputo, attended the UN meeting on the proposal.

The United Nations on Sunday adopted a resolution clearing the way for a US-led military strike to oust Haiti's de facto regime.

But in Argentina, President Carlos Menem — who has said Argentina could play a role in the multinational force — put

off asking the legislature to vote to commit troops to the multinational force.

Menem was to have sent his proposal for troops on Monday or Tuesday, but has now held off action until next week.

Legislative sources suggested the delay was to give the Haitian leaders a chance to leave voluntarily in the coming days to avoid an armed conflict.

Parties from all sides here voiced opposition to armed intervention to force the reinstatement of elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.



Photo released yesterday of Frenchman Jean-Michel Braquet, 27, taken by his captors at their jungle headquarters. Braquet with two other foreigners were seized by Khmer Rouge guerrillas during an attack on a train on July 26.

Tokyo experiences hottest day in history

TOKYO, Aug 3: Hot air under high pressure has been hovering near Japan for a week, drying out farms, killing chickens and causing people to pass out. On Wednesday, it gave Tokyo its hottest day in history, reports AP.

The mercury topped 39.1 C (102.38 F) in Tokyo, foreshadowing the record heat expected to envelop the country for at least another week, National Weather Agency officials said.

Blistering heat across the country has already caused water levels in reservoirs to reach dangerously low levels, and the water supply has been reduced in cities fed by 33 of the country's largest dams, according to another official.

Rationing is most severe in Takamatsu, Kagawa prefecture, about 680 kilometres (425 miles) southwest of Tokyo, where tap water now only runs from 4 pm to 9 pm.

In Matsuyama, Ehime pre-

fecture, also on the western island of Shikoku, rationing has caused a historic century-old hot spring spa to partially close, forfeiting one-third of its business, according to Yasushi Yano, who manages the Dago Hot Spring Bathhouse.

Businesses and residents throughout the country are saving dirty dish and bath water to flush toilets. But consumers are spending more on air conditioning, beer, bathing suits and anything else involved with cooling off.

When many of the capital's 8 million residents craned up their air conditioners simultaneously on Wednesday afternoon, Tokyo Electric Power Co had to pour out 57 million kilowatts of electricity to keep them running. It almost broke the all-time record for peak usage of 57.3 million kilowatts, set the day before, said TEPCO official Hiroyuki Kuroda.

Koji Nomoto, an animal

handler at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo, said many species that usually get out and move around are sleeping the heat wave off in the shade.

"The monkeys are unusually inactive in this heat, and we've had a lot fewer visitors," he said, adding that the few animal lovers he did see were gazing longingly at the refrigerated penguin habitat.

While the penguins may be oblivious to the heat wave, it meant tragedy for some birds and their owners in western Japan's chicken belt.

Masatoshi Kagawa, an official at the Japan Chicken Association, said the fowl have been dying from heat shock for a week, and the nationwide beak count of poultry casualties had reached 170,000.

"It might sound funny, but it's no laughing matter to a chicken farmer," he said, adding that many had installed air conditioning and huge fans to keep their chickens cool.

Christopher will travel to ME tomorrow

WASHINGTON, Aug 3: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will travel Friday to the Middle East to hold talks on the peace process, the State Department said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Christopher, who was to arrive in Cairo Saturday on the first leg of his tour, was also to travel to Syria, Israel and Jordan during the visit which was expected to last until "the middle of next week," a State Department spokesman said.

According to US officials, Christopher will attempt to jumpstart stalled peace negotiations between Syria and Israel following the breakthrough agreement signed July 25 between Jordan and Israel.

India offers to train Kuwaiti militarymen

KUWAIT, Aug 3: India has offered to train some Kuwaiti military personnel, India's ambassador to Kuwait said today, reports Reuter.

"We have offered some training vacancies at our academies," Ambassador Prem Singh said by telephone, adding no agreement had yet been reached. An Indian military liaison officer based in Riyadh recently made the offer to Kuwaiti officials, he said.

Kuwaiti officers already receive training in Arab countries, the United States and Europe. Kuwait has a 13,700-strong active military and 20,000 reserves.

Aside from a few people who passed out in Shikoku, there have been no reports of injury or death due to the heat, police officials said.

The government officials followed a Japanese custom of requesting anonymity.

Meteorologists say the heat is due to a huge glob of high-pressure hot air hovering off Japan's southeast coast, and a low pressure area to the north. The low pressure vacuums the hot air up over Japan.

Before Wednesday, the hottest day for Tokyo since the weather bureau began keeping records in 1923 was 38.4 C (101.12 F), set in 1953. Japan's hottest day ever recorded was 40.8 C (105.44 F), set in 1933 in northern Yamagata prefecture.

The hottest day so far this year was on Tuesday, at 39.7 C (103.46 F) in Kofu City, Yamanashi prefecture, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) west of Tokyo.

Off the Record



US President Bill Clinton reacts Tuesday as entertainer Patti LaBelle sings "happy birthday" to him during a Democratic National Committee fund-raising event. The event raised 1.2 million dollars for the Democratic Party. — AFP photo

Thief offers to pay back money in installments

BREST: A garage owner who had cash and cheque-books stolen from his office in Brest, northwest France, said on Wednesday he received a letter from the thief offering to pay back the money in installments, reports AFP.

"I stole to feed my children, because I don't even have enough money to buy them milk," read the unsigned letter which also proposed "reimbursing you in several installments."

The mechanic, who has 2,800 franc (520 dollars), two cheque-books and customers cheques taken by the thief, said all the cheques and both cheque-books were returned "without a single cheque missing" in his mailbox along with the letter.

Imelda's jewels to be auctioned

MANILA: The Philippine government plans to auction off up to 30 million dollar worth of jewels belonging to former first lady Imelda Marcos, reports AP.

Reynaldo Guiao of the Presidential Commission on Good Government said during a Senate committee hearing that the jewels would be auctioned in Bern, Switzerland next May.

The jewels include pieces which had been on display at the Philippine Central Bank as well as others seized at the presidential palace when Marcos' late husband, Ferdinand Marcos, was ousted in the 1986 "people power" revolution.

Marcos died in exile in Hawaii in 1989. Marcos returned here in 1991 and ran unsuccessfully for president the following year. She was convicted of corruption last year and sentenced to 18-24 years imprisonment but remains free on appeal.

The government claims Marcos and his associates embezzled billions of dollars during his 20-year rule. Efforts to recover substantial amounts have bogged down in various legal battles.

Cairo talks a waste of time, says Arafat

JERUSALEM, Aug 3: PLO leader Yasser Arafat said he had been humiliated and driven to "despair" by he Israelis since his return to Gaza, in an interview with the Daily Haaretz today, reports AFP.

"I have been driven to despair, it is getting harder and harder to go on, an explosion could happen any time, each day brings its share of humiliations from the Israelis, and they are worse each time, he said.

Arafat, chairman of the Palestinian authority running autonomy in the Gaza Strip and

Jericho, said ongoing talks in Cairo on extending Palestinian self-rule to the rest of the West Bank were "a waste of time."

"We were supposed to be empowered in the West Bank within three months" after the start of Palestinian self-rule, he said.

"What happened to empowerment, what happened with the safe passages" that were supposed to link Gaza and Jericho across Israeli territory, he said.

"I have lost my optimism, patience has its limits," Arafat added bitterly.

Kashmiri police file case against 10 BSF men

SRINAGAR, Aug 3: Kashmir police have filed a case against 10 Indian border guards for torturing a suspected Muslim militant to death, dismembering his body and throwing it in a sewer, an official said here Tuesday, reports AFP.

Satnam Singh Oberoi, a senior police official of the criminal division said the members of the Border Security Force (BSF), including an officer, had been charged with the murder of a civilian in January while in their custody.

Human rights groups and Kashmiri Muslim allege widespread rights abuse in the disputed Himalayan state where Islamic rebels have launched a bloody struggle to end Indian rule.

Oberoi said the accused killed Abdul Salam Bhat in cold blood after arresting him in the southern district of Anantnag on January 17 following a raid.

"During the investigation it was established that the BSF had concocted a story that the deceased had escaped from their custody," he said, while denouncing the "brutal and merciless" murder.

The probe began after a dismembered headless torso and limbs were found wrapped in a jute bag in a ditch. Bhat's head was discovered nearby.

The BSF has been embroiled in many such controversies in Kashmir and is seen as a symbol of repression by most residents of India's only Muslim-majority state.

Oberoi said the accused ended in 1988.

The British "turned a blind eye to Iraq's chemical attacks, remained silent in the face of missile attacks against civilian areas and defenceless people and did not hold back any assistance from the Iraqi regime," it added.

The radio, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation, accused Britain and the BBC of supporting the opposition, accused Britain and the BBC of supporting the opposition Mujahideen Khalk, which Iran blames for recent bombings and killings in Iran.

The Mujahideen denies responsibility for the attacks. It said Iran had invited British members of parliament and journalists to visit Tehran to examine the alleged role of the Mujahideen in the killing of two Christian pastors last month.

"This anti Iranian policy is not unprecedented in Britain," it said, charging that Britain supported Iraq during eight years of the Iran-Iraq war that