

BRIEFLY

Myanmar rebel leader Seng dies:

The leader of the largest group of ethnic rebels to reach a ceasefire with Myanmar's junta has died of a stroke at age 63, the group announced on Friday. AP reports from Bangkok.

Braung Seng, president of the Kachin Independence Organisation, died on Monday upon suffering his second stroke in less than a year en route to the group's headquarters in the region of northern Myanmar the group calls Kachinland. His remains arrived there on Thursday with full military honours.

Vietnam refuses visa to HR man:

Vietnam refused entry to a US human rights activist because he planned to commit "a provocative act" by presenting an award to a jailed dissident, the Foreign Affairs Ministry said in a statement on Friday. AP reports from Hanoi.

David L. Phillips, president of the Washington, DC-based Congressional Human Rights Foundation, flew to Vietnam without first obtaining an entry visa, and his rejection by police was a normal procedure, the statement said.

3 policemen shot in Jerusalem:

Three Israeli policemen were shot and wounded by a gunman in a car in Arab East Jerusalem yesterday, police said. They said it was unclear if the incident was "nationalistic or criminal." Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

A police spokesman said a car failed to stop after being ordered by police. The police gave chase and eventually stopped it but one of the people inside opened fire with an automatic weapon. Two regular policemen and a volunteer officer were wounded, the spokesman said.

Abducted Indian FF freed:

One day after he was kidnapped and tortured, an elderly businessman who helped India win independence from Britain in 1947, was freed by police. AP reports from New Delhi.

Jagdish Kodesia, 68, once a close associate of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi, was rescued on Wednesday night by police who arrested the three captors as they tried to collect a ransom.

Kodesia, who owns an advertising agency and printing press, had denied one of the kidnappers a job, and they abducted him in an effort to win a 200,000-rupee (6,700 dollars) ransom, police said.

PLO asks for UN observers in Hebron:

The Palestine Liberation Organisation asked the Security Council to reauthorise a UN observer mission for the West Bank town of Hebron, saying its mission had not been completed. AFP reports from United Nations.

Earlier this week, the 116 observers left Hebron, site of the massacre of 29 worshippers at the Mosque of Abraham, after Israel refused to allow an extension of the mission, according to a PLO letter obtained Thursday.

Coal mine blast kills 31 in China:

A gas explosion at a newly legalised coal mine in southwestern China killed 31 people, the official China Daily said yesterday, reports Reuter from Beijing.

It said the July 30 blast happened only 18 days after authorities issued a permit to the Youyi Coal Mine, which had long operated illegally in the remote Hui and Miao autonomous county of Guizhou province.

Japan's aid for Rwandan refugees:

Japan said on Friday it would airlift aid worth 190 million yen (1.9 million dollars), including tents, blankets, water tanks and medical supplies, to help Rwandan refugees, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Japan is also considering sending a medical team to areas where refugees have gathered.

6 killed in Brazilian bldg collapse:

A three-story building under construction in a Sao Paulo working class neighbourhood collapsed Thursday, killing at least six workers and injuring 12 others. AP reports from Sao Paulo.

21 die in Russian train crash:

A passenger train collided Thursday with a derailed cargo train that was blocking the track, leaving at least 21 dead and 51 wounded, news agencies reported. AP says from Moscow.

The crash occurred near the village of Dvuluchnoye, 570 kilometres (350 miles) south of Moscow, the Ministry for Emergency Situations told the Interfax and Itar-Tass news agencies.

Kurds on fast in German jails:

Kurdish inmates have launched a hunger strike in several German prisons to protest against what they say is Bonn's support of Turkey, their attorney disclosed on Thursday, reports AFP from Bonn.

Malaysia offers amnesty to Al Arqam leader

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 12: The government has offered amnesty to the leader of a banned Islamic sect if he renounces his teachings and returns from self-imposed exile in Jordan, news reports said on Friday, says AP.

In a related development, police accused the group, Al Arqam, of luring away local Muslim young men to communes in Thailand, Uzbekistan and the Philippines. Al Arqam denied the accusation as "without proof."

Malaysia may send emissaries to Jordan to persuade Ashaari to come back and renounce his teachings, which the government says are deviant and contrary to mainstream Islam, the Star newspaper reported.

The controversy centres around Ashaari's claim, reiterated in an interview published on Friday, that he has spoken to the Prophet Muhammad (SM) the founder of Islam.

Al Arqam was outlawed in August 5 and all its 40 communes and 237 schools were declared illegal. The group's 100,000 members were forbidden from preaching and other Malaysians told not to associate with them.

In an interview with the Star newspaper, Ashaari said his meeting with Prophet Muhammad (SM) was genuine and a recording of the conversation was only for internal circulation among his estimated 100,000 followers.

The Star published a separate interview with the deputy minister in the Prime Minister's department who said the government will not prosecute Ashaari if he agrees to renounce "deviantist teachings" and help rehabilitate his followers.

It may take years for the government to reform Al

Arqam members on its own but with Ashaari's help it could be done faster. Abdul Hamid Othman said. "He should not come back as if he was leading a government-in-exile," Hamid added.

The government was also willing to register it as a legal Islamic movement, he said.

Ashaari denies spreading deviantist teachings and says he will return on his own soon. The government has not sought to press charges against him pending legal advice from its advocate general.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has denied suggestions that the ban may have been motivated to crush Ashaari, who was seen as a political threat.

UMNO youth wing for KL-Tel Aviv diplomatic ties

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 12: The powerful youth wing of Premier Mahathir Mohamad's United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) today urged Malaysia's government to consider establishing diplomatic ties with Israel, reports AFP.

History has shown that Muslims could live in peace with Jews from the time of Prophet Mohammed (SM). UMNO youth chief Rahim Tamby Chik told the Bernama news agency.

Rahim's remarks came two weeks after the authorities confiscated the passport of the Malaysian King's brother, Tunku Abdullah Rahman, for visiting Israel.

Rahim said peace deals clinched between Tel Aviv and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Jordan set the stage for Malaysia to look into establishing diplomatic links with Israel.

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International

UN asks all states to stop arms supply to Afghan factions

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 12: The Security Council Thursday deplored the continuing civil war in Afghanistan and called on all states to stop the flow of weapons and promote peace, reports Reuter.

A statement read at a brief public meeting also called on all Afghans to continue to work with a United Nations special mission trying to foster a peaceful settlement.

The mission, headed by former Tunisian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Mestiri, has held meetings with a wide spectrum of Afghan leaders.

More than 11,500 people have been killed in factional battles for supremacy since Mujahideen guerrillas took over from a collapsed Communist government in April 1992 after 14 years of civil war.

AP adds: President Clinton's administration said Thursday that ending bloodshed and

"ongoing anarchy" in Afghanistan depends on finding a government acceptable to all Afghans, and it could include the long-exiled king.

Robin Raphael, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, made the statements to members of Congress. Some have been concerned by warlordism, killing and narcotics trafficking in the South Asian country since the fall of the last Soviet-installed government in 1992.

But "we can't plant a government in Afghanistan," said Raphael.

"Not unless we use the power we have," Rohrabacher retorted.

Rohrabacher, a Republican conservative, said he heard that terrorists who bombed the New York World Trade Centre in 1992 may have links with drug traffickers believed moving among Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Raphael said she could not discuss such matters at a public session.

Serbs steal heavy arms again

Bosnian army mine road near Sarajevo airport

SARAJEVO, Aug 12: Bosnian Serb forces have again stolen heavy weapons from a UN collection point while the UN-dominated Bosnian army has mined a road south of Sarajevo airport, UN officials said today, reports AFP.

UN protection force (UNPROFOR) spokesman Major Dacre Holloway said the Serbs took a 105 mm gun and ammunition from a collection point at Krivuljavec, northwest of Sarajevo, and switched it with a 76 mm gun.

Troops from UNPROFOR's Ukrainian contingent discovered the trick and recovered the larger gun after several hours of negotiations, he said.

But the Serbs then took

back the 76mm weapon and refused to give it up, even though it contravened the UN-declared 20-kilometre (12-mile) heavy weapon exclusion zone around Sarajevo.

Meanwhile, the Muslim-led government forces mined the road near the airport to prevent UN monitoring of their troop movements towards sites of clashes on the other side of the Bosnian capital, said UNPROFOR spokesman Lt Col Bertrand Labarque.

Mines were laid late Thursday outside an UNPROFOR position, between the Bosnian army-held district of Butmir and airport runways, said Labarque.

Seven shells landed near the airport runway, Tudjman said in his letter to the Council.

The airport is a neutral



An armed paramilitary soldier guards a group of Hindu pilgrims Wednesday in Srinagar, Kashmir, where some of the Muslim militant groups launched a ban on the annual pilgrimage to Amarnath, the abode of Lord Shiva. About 875 pilgrims drove into the valley under heavy security in defiance of the ban.

— AFP photo

Fresh fighting in Lanka: 64 die

COLOMBO, Aug 12: Tamil rebels stepped up attacks on military targets in strife-torn areas of Sri Lanka, killing at least 22 security personnel and raising the death toll in fresh fighting to 64, military officials said today, reports AFP.

Dozens of gunmen from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked an army camp in the thick jungles of the Batticaloa district today, killing 11 soldiers and losing at least 25 of their own men, an army spokesman said.

They attacked in strength, there was a fierce battle. Our men retreated initially but launched a counterattack to secure the camp. We lost 11 men. We have recovered the bodies of 25 Tigers," Brigadier

Genuine Kulatunga said.

"We expect their casualties to be much higher. Troops are conducting search and clear operations," Kulatunga said.

In northern Pooneryn, troops killed 17 LTTE guerrillas in an ambush today and seized seven automatic weapons, ammunition and communications equipment from the victims.

The officers in the area planned the ambush after soldiers killed two Tigers near our forward defences. After spotting a group of Tigers, our boys allowed them to come closer and then let them have it," Kulatunga said.

Two soldiers died in the fighting that followed the fresh battles came hours after LTTE gunmen stormed a police post

The LTTE guerrillas are leading a violent campaign for independence in the northeast

— AFP photo

Refugees protest abuses by Zairean army

Troops to be withdrawn from Goma

GOMA, Zaire, Aug 12: About 400 of Zaire's best soldiers are to be withdrawn from this border town following a protest by thousands of residents and refugees fed up with their thievery and thuggery, reports AFP.

Prime Minister Leon Kengo wa Dondo acknowledged Thursday that the troops, sent to Goma to help with the Rwandan refugee crisis, "got the situation out of control."

In view of what happened, the first decision is that troops responsible for that situation must be arrested and brought to court," Kengo wa Dondo told the Bernama news agency.

Rahim's remarks came two weeks after the authorities confiscated the passport of the Malaysian King's brother, Tunku Abdullah Rahman, for visiting Israel.

Rahim said peace deals clinched between Tel Aviv and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Jordan set the stage for Malaysia to look into establishing diplomatic links with Israel.

the soldiers have conducted house-to-house extortion campaigns and robbed Zairean citizens and Rwandan refugees alike at gunpoint.

Two soldiers were killed by outraged refugees last week. But the protests in Goma were the first significant sign of the frustration boiling over in the city of 80,000.

The city has been converted to a dollar economy by the influx of aid workers, journalists and American and other Western troops. Prices for scarce basic commodities have soared while the value of Zaire's currency has plummeted.

Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees office in Goma said today it was moving all available resources to Bakwatu, about 60 miles to the south, for fear of another massive refugee influx.

The victim's body was carried through the streets on a wooden stretcher by the demonstrators, who pelted troops with stones and blocked streets with large rocks and trash.

Goma residents claim that

are camped amid filth and

spoil in a number of sites

near Goma, and officials fear

that many Rwandans

refugees

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to a dollar economy by the

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journalists and

other Western

governments have accused the law to suppress political opponents and quell anti-government protests.

Recently dozens of dissidents have been arrested under the law and have been accused of proselytising, pro-

North ideology.

The security law forbids sympathy with North Korea's communist ideology as well as all contact without government sanction.

The continuous demand for the law's repeal makes it seem a difference of opinion exists between South Korea and the United States over the issue," ministry spokesman Chang Ki-ho quoted Han as telling Laney.

The governing Democratic Liberal Party also expressed dismay at the U.S. demand, its spokesman, Park Burn-Jin, said.

The US should not interfere in this business."

US accused of meddling in ROK's internal affairs

SEOUL, Aug 12: The Seoul government on Friday accused the United States of meddling in its internal affairs after US criticism of South Korea's national security law, reports AP.

Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo met with US Ambassador James Laney and expressed regrets over what he called Washington's unwarranted demand for the abolition of Seoul's law.

The security law forbids sympathy with North Korea's communist ideology as well as all contact without government sanction.

The continuous demand for the law's repeal makes it seem a difference of opinion exists between South Korea and the United States over the issue," ministry spokesman Chang