

## 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.

Brang 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." Reuters 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, 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 communities in Thailand, Uzbekistan and the Philippines. Al Arqam denied the accusation as "without proof."

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

The controversy centres around Aashaari'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 communities 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, Aashaari 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 Aashaari if he agrees to renounce "deviationist teachings" and help rehabilitate his followers.

It may take years for the government to reform Al

Arqam members on its own but with Aashaari's help it could be done faster, Abdul Hamid Othman said. But, "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.

Aashaari denies spreading deviationist 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 Aashaari, 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.

**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.

"The Council deplores the continuing civil war in Afghanistan which has brought death and destruction to the people of Afghanistan and has created a threat to the stability and security of other countries in the region," the Council statement said.

"The Council calls on all states to take the necessary steps to promote peace in Afghanistan, to stop the flow of weapons to the parties, and to put an end to this destructive conflict."

It also urged the international community to "assist Afghans in rebuilding their shattered country as conditions permit."

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.

"Unable to affect events directly, we support coordinated efforts by the UN" and other international organisations to find a government "acceptable to all Afghans," she said.

"This political process could include the former King, Zahir Shah, should he so desire," said Raphael. He occa-

sionally meets with US officials at his exile retreat near Rome. The United States and world community ultimately will have to pay a high price for inattention to Afghanistan, Rep Dana Rohrabacher warned.

"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 Muslim-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 Krivovljavi, 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 Labarousse.

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

The airport is a neutral

zone, guarded by a French unit of UNPROFOR.

He said the Muslim-led government forces were trying to prevent UN peacekeepers from monitoring the movements of troops who use a tunnel dug underneath the airport's runway to travel from Sarajevo to Butmir.

Another report adds: Bosnian Serb troops shelled the airport of Dubrovnik in southern Croatia Thursday. Croatian President Franjo Tudjman charged in a letter to the UN Security Council carried by local media outlets.

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



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

**Algerian Muslim rebels renew threat to France**

BEIRUT, Aug 12: Islamic extremists in Algeria threatened Friday to strike at French interests there if Paris persists in a crackdown on Muslim fundamentalists in France, reports AP.

The Armed Islamic Group, which has claimed responsibility for the killing of three French guards and two French consular officials in Algiers on Aug 3, also demanded that all French nationals leave Algeria.

In response to the killings, France has cracked down on Islamic extremists it says are linked to the bloody campaign to install an Islamic state in Algeria.

It has detained 23 people suspected of being linked to Islamic groups, banned five Islamic publications, questioned thousands of people in identity checks and ordered regional officials to guard against "Islamic terrorism."

In a statement published on the front page of the London-based Arabic-language newspaper Al-Hayat, the Armed Islamic Group listed demands including a call for France, Algeria's former colonial ruler, to stop supporting the Algerian government, and paying Muslims in Algeria who have suffered under a crackdown there.

**12 Indians charged with drug offence in Philippines**

MANILA, Aug 12: Twelve Indian nationals have been charged with a drug offence which could bring the death penalty if they are convicted, the Department of Justice said Friday, reports AP.

One of the Indians, Ashok Uttam, and two unidentified persons remain at large, the department said. The others are jailed at the National Bureau of Investigation.

The 11 others were arrested July 4 for allegedly manufacturing more than 6,900 kilograms of methaqualone, a prohibited drug.

The offence carries the death penalty under a new law which went into effect this year. The 1987 constitution abolished the death penalty but allowed for Congress to reimpose it for "heinous crimes."

Congress restored the death penalty amid a public outcry over rising crime. Several defendants have been sentenced to death since then but no executions have been carried out.

The Indians in custody were identified as Pramod Shriad Jogdiko, Shaik Easaf, S Lakshminarayana, Augustine Rajesh, Nagayya Vanam, Moham-mad Ralique, Kausar Ali, Nabi P Gulam, Mengesh Jadhav, Laxman Kudam and Cajetan Mijares.

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

**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

in government-controlled Mannar Island off the north-western coast, killing at least nine policemen, including an officer, and wounding 10 others, police said.

The military had claimed that Mannar Island was cleared of guerrillas three years ago, but the rebels have staged frequent raids on police posts on the islet.

The latest outbreak of fighting was the worst since troops repulsed an LTTE attack on the main Palaly military base eleven days ago. The rebels destroyed an airforce helicopter parked in the Palaly Airfield and killed an airman.

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

**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 AP.

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 Radio Zaire.

"Second, all units in Goma and in Bukavu must be withdrawn and replaced by other contingents in order to avoid the recurrence of this situation," the prime minister said. The soldiers sent to Goma were drawn from the presi-

dential guard and other elite units, raising concern about the quality of the troops that will replace them.

Kengo wa Dondo spoke in Kinshasa, the Zairean capital, after briefing President Mobutu Sese Seko on a riot by more than 5,000 people in Goma on Thursday that briefly blocked food convoys.

The nearly two-hour protest by residents and some refugees was set off by the shooting to death of a well-known currency dealer by a Zairean soldier demanding money.

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

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 of office in Goma said today it was moving all available resources to Bukavu, about 60 miles to the south, for fear of another massive refugee influx.

Nearly one million refugees

are camped amid filth and squalor in a number of sites near Goma, and officials fear that many Rwandans may pour over the border into Bukavu when the French withdraw from a so-called protective zone in southwestern Rwanda later this month.

"We can't prepare for them in a week," Panos Mountzis, a spokesman for the UN refugee agency, told reporters in Goma today.

Despite a US military intervention and an outpouring of money and goods from around the world, food, shelter material and other aid is in short supply in Goma, with little to spare for another emergency.

The French have said they will withdraw their remaining 2,000 soldiers from southwestern Rwanda by Aug 22. They are to be replaced by African UN peacekeepers, but most have not yet arrived.

**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 abolishment of Seoul's law.

The US State Department said Thursday that it hopes South Korea would abolish the law, which critics say is often used to silence political dissent.

The security law has long been a bone of contention between the ruling and opposition camps. It gives government authorities almost unlimited powers to clamp down on activity they classify as pro-North Korean.

Past military-backed gov-

ernments 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 US demand. Its spokesman, Par Bum-Jin, said, "the United States should not interfere in this business."

**Off the Record****Liz was prescribed dosages 'incompatible with life'**

LOS ANGELES: A US state medical board has reprimanded three doctors who wrote actress Elizabeth Taylor 1,000 prescriptions for painkillers, tranquilizers and other drugs, reports AP.

The Medical Board of California found that the three doctors had falsified records to cover up the prescriptions for 28 drugs including sleeping pills, painkillers and tranquilizers from 1983 to 1988.

The board did not, however, suspend or revoke the doctors' licences.

One medical expert examining the case said he assumed the patient was dead because "the dosages were incompatible with life." Deputy Attorney General Earl Ploewman said.

Lawyers representing the doctors said Elizabeth Taylor needed more drugs to control back and neck pain and that she "had no life without painkillers."

Taylor, who wasn't named in the complaint, spent seven weeks in a rehabilitation centre in 1983 after acknowledging her 35-year addiction to sleeping pills and painkillers.

**'Spiderman' jailed for 2289 thefts**

BRISBANE: The thief dubbed "Spiderman" by police because of his ability to climb and rob high-rise apartments was sentenced Thursday to 20 years in prison, reports AP.

Steven Thompson, 24, pleaded guilty in the Brisbane District Court to 2,289 counts of theft. Police said his list of crimes was one of the longest to go before an Australian court.

Prosecutors said Thompson stole 2.4 million US dollars in goods and cash between March 1990 and January 1994.

He targeted upmarket houses and apartments and sometimes robbed up to 20 homes in one night. He used only his hands and feet to climb multi-story buildings.

Defence counsel Peter Smid said Thompson turned to crime to pay for a drug habit.

**Condom in a nutshell**

OTTAWA: A Canadian housewife opened a walnut and was shocked to find a condom inside, reports Reuter.

"When I cracked one open for my son, I discovered a condom inside," Tracy Chalcraft of Chatham, Ontario, told the Canadian Press news agency.

The supermarket where she bought the nuts gave her a 20 dollar food voucher as compensation. But its manager was at a loss for an explanation of how the unused prophylactic got there.

The item apparently came from a nearby sex shop that sells walnuts with condoms as a novelty and a prankster may have tossed one into the supermarket's bulk foods section.

**Solvents cause deafness!**

LONDON: Solvents, paint and similar chemicals can cause hearing loss, American researchers reported yesterday, says Reuter.

Noise is not the only cause of hearing loss in workers, they said in a report in the Lancet medical journal.

Dr Thais Morata and colleagues at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati, Ohio said hearing loss was four times more common in workers in the printing and paint manufacturing industries exposed to noise, than in those not exposed to either.

There could be workers who are at risk of an occupational hearing loss from chemicals alone or from combined noise and chemical exposures," they wrote.

Solvents may injure the delicate cells and nerve endings inside the ear, the researchers added.

**Ghali considers sending mission to Burundi**

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 12: Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali is considering the dispatch of a mission to Burundi to try to defuse mounting ethnic strife which threatens to erupt as in neighbouring Rwanda, UN officials said Thursday, reports Reuter.

One source said it would be primarily a humanitarian mission but with an element of preventive diplomacy. Its size and composition were not yet known.

Security Council president Yuli Vorontsov of Russia told reporters that Council members had suggested that some of their colleagues now visiting Mozambique might make a fact-finding trip to Burundi, Burundi's capital, since the situation there "is worrying us."

Several hundred people have been killed in clashes in recent weeks between ethnic Tutsis and Hutus.

Hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees have flooded

into the country while large numbers of Burundi nationals, who fled in the wake of violence last year, have since returned.

But relief operations have been made more difficult because of lack of security in Burujumbura.

Assistant Secretary-General Alvaro de Soto told reporters the Secretary General would present the Security Council with proposals "so that this volatile situation does not explode."

Burundi's Tutsi leadership was gradually yielding power to Hutus in recent years but renegade Tutsi soldiers last October murdered the country's first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, and thousands of people have since been killed.

Ndadaye's successor, Cyprien Ntaryamira, also a Hutu, was killed April 6 in a suspicious plane crash.