

International

BRIEFLY

Murayama in Singapore:

Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama arrived in Singapore yesterday for a 48-hour official visit, the last leg of a four-nation Southeast Asian tour, AFP reports from Singapore.

Murayama, who flew in from Kuala Lumpur, was met at Singapore's Changi Airport by Trade and Industry Minister Yeo Cheow Tong. He earlier visited the Philippines and Vietnam.

Deng's condition good: Deng Xiaoping, China's 90-year-old paramount leader, still takes a daily walk, according to a Politburo member and bridge partner who gave new reassurances about Deng's condition. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Ding Guangen, head of the Communist Party's powerful propaganda department, told a Hong Kong media delegation: "Comrade Xiaoping's health is very good," the Wen Wei Po newspaper reported. He still sticks to taking a daily walk to build himself up physically," Ding said.

Kang appears in public: North Korean Premier Kang Song-San appeared in public this weekend, belying an earlier speculation that he might have been ousted following the reported defection of his son-in-law, a radio report said Sunday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Kang was among those at a Pyongyang meeting on Saturday to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the publication of a "historical work" by Kim Jong-Il, heir-apparent to late North Korean President Kim Il-Sung, the Pyongyang radio report, monitored in Tokyo said.

Moros take 37 hostages: Troops Sunday cordoned off an area where Muslim rebels were believed holding a group of South Koreans and Filipinos as efforts were underway to negotiate their release, AP reports from Isulan.

Police said about 30 gunmen from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front seized seven South Korean engineers and 30 Filipinos during a raid Saturday on the Shinsung Construction Corp camp near Carmen, about 910 kilometers (560 miles) south of Manila.

Hamas kills 2 Israelis: The militant Muslim group Hamas said on Saturday its guerrillas slashed the throats of two Israeli construction workers near Tel Aviv, reports Reuter.

It vowed to strike twice more by the end of the year. Israeli police seized 118 Arabs for questioning over the killings, a spokesman said.

Cleric denounces Cairo confce: A leading Iranian clergyman has denounced the UN world population conference to be held in Cairo next month, charging that the forum promotes abortion, Tehran Times said yesterday. AFP reports from Tehran.

Abbas Ali Arif Zanjani, an expert on Islamic law and an MP, said abortion was an "inhumane and un-Islamic practice" which amounted to "murder except in certain cases."

Indian train mishap kills 3: A passenger train rammed into a stationary freight train Sunday in western India, killing 3 people and injuring 49 others, a news report said. AP says from New Delhi.

The injured were taken to a hospital in Sanjan town in Gujarat state, 150 kilometers (95 miles) from Bombay.

Chinese dissident Wang freed: The former student leader of the 1989 democracy movement Wang Dan was released yesterday morning after having been detained for 12 hours by police, he said. AFP reports from Beijing.

The police brought me home at about three in the morning, (1900 GMT on Saturday) but they stepped up the surveillance of my building even further, he said by telephone.

15 women held at Pak brothel: Pakistani police said on Saturday that they had arrested nine Iranian and six Afghan women and five Pakistani men in a raid on a brothel in Quetta in the southwestern province of Baluchistan, Reuter reports from Quetta.

They said the women had no passports or travel documents and several were minors aged as young as 14.

Argentine Tango singer dies: Roberto Goyeneche, one of Argentina's last great Tango singers, died on Saturday in a hospital in Buenos Aires, his family said. He was 68. Reuter reports from Buenos Aires.

Goyeneche's peculiar timing — as if he was chewing on his words, an Argentine critic said won him fans around the world from Buenos Aires to Tokyo and from New York's Carnegie Hall to Rome.

Cleric criticises Ramos: In an apparent attack on President Fidel Ramos, the Philippines' most prominent cleric has accused the government of corruption and claimed leaders are wasting public funds on perks and travelling, AP reports from Manila.

"Graft and corruption are the order of the day," Cardinal Jaime L. Sin, archbishop of Manila, said during a homily late Saturday at an anti-abortion conference.

Quake hits Algeria: A "powerful tremor" hit western Algeria yesterday causing widespread panic in an area where an August 18 quake killed more than 170 people and made thousands homeless, Algerian state radio reported. Reuter says from Tunis.

The radio, quoting a correspondent in the Mascara region, gave no details of the strength of the quake or whether there were any injuries or damage. The earlier quake measured 5.6 on the open-ended Richter scale.

Papuan govt talks with rebels: Papua New Guinea has agreed to an agenda for peace talks with secessionist rebels on its Bougainville province, officials from both sides said. AFP reports from Port Moresby.

Senior members of the government and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) concluded a round of talks in the Solomon Islands on Saturday, a joint statement from the meeting said.

Kurds scared to return home:

Clashes since May in northern Iraq have left thousands of Kurdish refugees in neighbouring Iran too scared to return to their homes, UN officials said on Saturday. AFP reports from Arbil.

Only 200 Iraqi Kurdish families have returned to northern Iraq so far this year, although the United Nations set up a programme to support 50,000 returning refugees from Iran.

200 extremists held in Oman: Omani security forces have rounded up more than 200 Islamic militants in a series of raids which began in May. Western diplomats in Muscat said on Saturday. AFP reports from Nicosia.

Politicians, soldiers, academics and students were among those arrested, the diplomats told by telephone.

Kenya sacks many doctors for striking

NAIROBI, Aug 28: Kenya's government said today it had sacked most of the 3,000 public-sector doctors who began a strike in June that has virtually closed down state hospitals, reports Reuter.

Dennis Afande, permanent secretary for health, sent letters to individual doctors, saying they had been fired for deserting their duty with effect from June 16 when the strike began.

Strike leader Givan Ataka said the dismissal was illegal and he would contest it in court.

BOMBAY, Aug 28: The recent murder of a Hindu lawmaker here in India's financial heart and capital of Maharashtra state, has again sparked charges that local politicians and gangsters are literally partners in crime, reports AFP.

Ramdas Nayak, the chief of the Bombay chapter of India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was shot dead by unidentified gunmen on Thursday outside his house in an upscale suburb.

The killers sprayed 54 bullets into Nayak, triggering a

day's general strike to protest the killing of the eighth politician in two years. Other victims belonged to the ruling Congress (I) party and the militant Hindu Shiv Sena (Shiva's army) group.

Nayak was killed because of his links with criminals, journalist Nikhil Wagle told AFP.

"He was known as a gentleman extortionist who would take money very politely."

Wagle, who is leading a sit-in from a makeshift tent here to protest the evacuation of poor people from a vast site by a Congress activist and property developer, said all parties

were directly involved with the underworld.

That is our tragedy as a people, he said.

His criticism reflects the general disenchantment with allegations of a criminal-politician nexus fighting to wrest control of the city's lucrative real estate, protection, gambling, prostitution, drug and smuggling rackets.

The bearded journalist, who was arrested in April for calling state lawmakers "hypocrites and liars" for eulogizing a slain colleague with proven criminal links, said

booming land prices had made things worse.

The financial importance of Bombay has shot up with Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar planning to make Bombay into another Singapore. Poor people who live in slums have to be pushed out so that developers can make money, he said.

That is where criminals come in handy to politicians."

Pawar, a former Defence Minister and a previous aspirant to the Prime Minister's office, has been accused of shielding corrupt politicians and making money from Naor

property deals in Bombay.

Just a day before Nayak was killed, senior Bombay police officer Ulhas Joshi told the High Court that Pawar had "often obstructed action against big-time criminals."

His latest accused is Govind Khairnar, a top-level city official, who was suspended last month for "embarrassing the administration" following a crusade against the criminalisation of politics, which turned Khairnar into a folk hero.

Khairnar is guarded round-the-clock by seven armed commandos following attacks

on the Israeli embassy.

"It only comes under scrutiny and attack when some traumatic event occurs," he added.

International

Kumaratunga govt suspends arms deal with Russia

COLOMBO, Aug 28: Sri Lanka's new government has suspended a controversial arms deal with Russia for armoured vehicles, gunboats, helicopters and transport aircraft. The Independent Sunday island newspaper reported.

It said Prime Minister Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, whose People's Alliance (PA) won a narrow victory in the August 16 general election, had cancelled further payments on the 73 million dollar deal and ordered an inquiry.

Government officials were not immediately available for comment.

Military sources said the equipment was ordered by the previous government for a major offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels, fighting for independence in the island's north and east.

The Sunday Island said an unnamed state bank had already made an initial payment of 10 per cent of the cost of the package, although the payment did not have the approval of Parliament or the Finance Ministry.

It said the previous government had organised a foreign loan to finance the deal.

Six BNP infantry fighting vehicles, of a total of some 200 armoured vehicles on order, were airlifted to Sri Lanka from Russia for training purposes two weeks ago, military sources said.

PA spokesman Dharmasiri Senanayake, now the Minister of Information, Tourism and Aviation, said before the election the party might not honour the deal if it was voted into power.

PA adds: Sri Lanka's consti-

tution automatically makes the president in charge of the defense ministry. Wijetunga faces a presidential election in November.

Kumaratunga ordered an investigation into the contract and said only 10 per cent of the money has been paid to Russia so far.

Kumaratunga's campaign

against the 17-year UNP rule focused on what she called rampant corruption in the government and kickbacks to government ministers.

She also alleged the UNP government was not keen to end the 11-year ethnic war, which has left 34,000 people dead, because cabinet ministers were making money on the deal.

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Friday postponed ratification of a rupees 14 billion dollar 291 million dollar deal signed by the previous regime for five A-340 aircraft from Airbus Industrie of France for the state airline, Air Lanka, amid criticism of the way the deal was rushed through.

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