

BRIEFLY

Pak jet crashes: A Pakistan air force jet crashed into a house in Peshwar yesterday...

Pilotless Chinese plane: China has successfully launched its first pilotless solar-powered aircraft...

Malaysia to buy US ship: The Royal Malaysian Navy plans to buy a tank landing ship from the United States Navy...

Murayama ends Asia trip: Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama of Japan left Singapore on Tuesday...

Quake shakes eastern Japan: An earthquake registering 4.5 on the Richter scale shook eastern Japan yesterday morning...

Chakrapong goes to Finland: Cambodian Prince Norodom Chakrapong, an alleged key player in last month's failed coup...

Fire makes 4000 Thais homeless: More than 4,000 people were left homeless yesterday after a fire swept through a crowded Bangkok slum area...

Cuba to sign N-treaty: Cuba announced Monday that it will sign a treaty that bans nuclear weapons and requires peaceful use of nuclear energy...

5 hurt in Croatian blast: Four Bosnian Muslims and a UN soldier were wounded by mines in a frontline zone of Serb held Croatia...

US Surgeon Gen's son jailed: A judge sentenced a son of U.S. Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders on Monday to 10 years in prison for selling one eighth of an ounce (7 grams) of cocaine to an undercover policeman...

40 drowned in West Bengal: At least 40 people were reported missing after their boat sank in a river during a storm in the Indian State of West Bengal...

Israeli killed in S Lebanon: One Israeli soldier was killed and another was wounded in a guerrilla attack in the Jewish state's occupation zone in Southern Lebanon on Monday...

Hussein to visit Jerusalem: King Hussein of Jordan said in a newspaper interview published on Tuesday that he would visit Jerusalem "very soon."

Tajik rebels kill Russian guard: A Russian border guard was killed by Tajik opposition fighters while defending the Tajik-Afghan border early Tuesday morning...

Mandela to visit Indonesia: South African President Nelson Mandela is scheduled to make an unofficial visit to Indonesia later this week for talks with President Suharto...

Filipino army week: The Philippine military may be one of the weakest in Asia but it could still make any foreign attack a bloody affair for invaders...

Lankan cabinet to discuss Tamils' conditions today

COLOMBO, Aug 30: The government praised Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels Tuesday for agreeing to hold peace talks...

Chandrika Kumaratunga became prime minister and her Peoples' Alliance won control of parliament in an election August 16 after promising to hold unconditional peace talks with the guerrillas...

Such negotiations would be a major breakthrough because the party that lost power in the election for the first time in 17 years had refused to hold talks unless the rebels laid down arms...

Tamils of Jaffna Peninsula in the North by depriving them of 42 basic commodities, including kerosine, batteries and fertilizer...

The guerillas, from the Hindu Tamil minority, accuse the nation's majority Buddhist Sinhalese of discrimination. More than 34,000 people have been killed in the insurgency...

Meanwhile, the United National Party (UNP), swept from power after 17 years in this month's general elections, today accused the new government of not acting to stop violent attacks on its supporters...

A senior official said four or five UNP supporters had been killed in post-poll violence. Others reported that they had been blinded, had hands and legs hacked off or had lost their homes in attacks by supporters of the ruling people's alliance, he said.



To assure good luck on her voyage, Ariadne Garcia, 16, sprinkles water on a religious statue attached to the bow of a small boat before she and others leave Cuba on August 29 from the beach at Guanabo, 35 km east of Havana...

Rabbani's forces threaten to bomb civilian areas

ISLAMABAD, Aug 30: The forces of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani have threatened to bomb the bases and civilian areas held by his arch-foe Gulbuddin Hekmatyar unless Hekmatyar stops rocketing the capital Kabul...

The threat to hit Hekmatyar's Charasyab base south of Kabul and other areas under his control was made in a Defence Ministry statement, broadcast by the Rabbani-controlled Kabul Radio on Monday night amid renewed UN efforts for peace...

was the first time the Kabul administration had threatened to bomb even civilian areas under Prime Minister Hekmatyar's control. "Hundreds of people have been killed, thousands wounded and hundreds of buildings destroyed by rockets and mortar shells fired on the city," the radio, monitored in Islamabad, said about almost daily attacks on Kabul...

It said the authorities had resisted popular pressure to retaliate for fear of harming the innocent, and in the hope that Hekmatyar's "feelings as a human being would prevail". "Unfortunately, these hopes proved fruitless," it said. "If Gulbuddin's militias do not stop firing missiles on the residential areas of Kabul city and killing innocent people, Charasyab's Bazaar... and other military and residential areas and militia bases in other regions will come under air and land bombardment by the Islamic army of Afghanistan."

74 feared dead in Filipino coal mine blast

MANILA, Aug 30: Up to 74 people were feared dead in the Philippines' worst coal mining disaster as rescuers battled poisonous fumes to reach workers trapped underground at a state-owned colliery in the south, officials said today...

A methane gas explosion ripped through the Philippine National Oil Co Energy Development Corp (PNOC-EDC) mine site near Malangas town at 7:45 pm (11:45 GMT) on Monday, trapping 74 of the 170 miners working in underground tunnels at the time, officials said. Radio station DZXL reported that the bodies of 62 people have been recovered from the tunnels of the country's largest coal mine...

Energy Undersecretary Rufino Bomasang told a news conference. Another accident in the central island of Cebu in the mid 1980s claimed 27 lives, he added. "Our priority is to rescue the 27 still unaccounted for. There is still a possibility of them being alive," company President Nazario Vasquez said. Press Secretary Jesus Sison told reporters president Fidel Ramos had ordered officials of the Pnoc Subsidiary, the army and the police to speed up the rescue work and released disaster funds for the survivors and the families of the dead.

India to challenge China as planet's most populous nation

NEW DELHI, Aug 30: India will challenge China as the planet's most populous nation with 1.5 billion people by 2035, according to World Bank projections, but the warning has not unduly worried demographers here, reports AFP. The child boom, a result of failed birth-control programmes, illiteracy, poverty, gender bias and religious taboos, can be checked, they say...

The four states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh with the highest illiteracy rates account for 40 per cent of India's population. Kerala in the south, boasting 100 per cent literacy, had the lowest birth rate of 17.7 per thousand in 1992. Nearly a third of the country's 8.6 million people live in poverty and the average rate of births is currently 3.6 for a woman over her lifetime. India's annual population growth rate fell to 1.9 per cent in 1992 from 2.15 per cent in 1981. However, projections for a billion-plus figure in 2001 are still valid. The headcount swells by 17 million people, or the population of Australia, every year. The current average of 72,000 births daily accelerated as the infant mortality rate shrank to 80 per 1,000 in 1991 from 150 three decades ago, and life expectancy rose to 60 years from 32. New Delhi is anxious to stem the child boom with its annual \$75 million dollar family planning programme, which has failed to take off. Critics say a short-circuited digital population clock at a busy New Delhi intersection sums up the state of the programme, ironically symbolised with an inverted red triangle — the traditional Hindu sign of fertility. The notion that family planning will check population by itself is wrong, said Ena Singh of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). "The quality of health services must improve and women empowered to have choices." India's hopes to check the growth with monetary incentives for sterilisation, suggested by American experts in the 1960s, has failed due to corruption. "There are over 574,000 villages and it is impossible to keep proper records. Targets are shown as being achieved but many of the cases recorded are fake or relate to tubectomies on women past the child-bearing age," said Bose. The UNFPA official said vasectomies, although "safer, cheaper and more effective" were unpopular. Strong memories of forced sterilisations during emergency rule between 1975 and 1977 also haunted the Indian male, she said. A UNDP report says there were 341,256 vasectomies in 1989-91 compared with 174,008 in 1991-92 but inputs from two Delhi hospitals show a new non-surgical method is becoming popular.

force crunch from declining birthrates, Asia will have ample people. "The West will have to change its immigration policies to prevent economic slowdown, Bose said. "India and China will be economic superpowers because of their manpower in the next century." Bose, who will attend the UN world population conference beginning September 5 in Cairo, also said changes in India's birth-limiting policies, the world's first coordinated programme launched in 1951, will make a significant impact. "But development is the best contraceptive," he said, echoing former Health Minister Karan Singh, who advocated total literacy and the fulfillment of people's basic needs to arrest the swelling headcount.

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Off the Record

Beauty pageant turns violent: CAPE TOWN: A South African student beauty pageant ended in violence when part of the crowd protested because a black finalist was not crowned queen, the Cape Times newspaper reported on Tuesday, says Reuter. The contest at the weekend was abandoned after Bukelwa Mabinda, who is black, was named second princess and members of the crowd began pelting the stage with bottles and cans, apparently because they had wanted her to win. The master of ceremonies was struck on the back by an object and taken for treatment. Mabinda and the other finalists, Charlotte Bouw and Rene Maarman, who are of mixed race, were taken back stage to protect them from the rampaging group.

Dog savages master: MOSCOW: A bull-terrier attacked its master while he was asleep and bit through his throat, killing him, police in the western Siberian town of Omsk said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Moscow. The dog savaged its owner while he was taking a nap on a sofa, news agencies quoted police officials as saying. The man's wife found her husband dead with throat and facial wounds with the bull-terrier sitting calmly alongside. She called police who took the dog outside and shot it. Itar-Tass news agency said the bull-terrier had probably turned on its master because he had earlier beaten it for chasing a cat.

Baby smuggling rampant: KUALA LUMPUR: Police have rescued 13 babies smuggled from neighbouring Thailand by a syndicate that sold infants to childless couples in Malaysia, a news agency said Tuesday, reports AP. The babies were rescued during the first seven months this year from various parts of Malaysia, Bernama news agency reported. Investigations showed that the babies were sold for between 2,000 ringgit and 10,000 ringgit (dhs 785 and dhs 3,290), Fong Wai Sek, the chief of police in the northwestern state of Perlis, which abuts Thailand, told Bernama. Police say adoption gangs steal babies or buy them from prostitutes or unwed mothers for 30 dollar to 105 dollars. 1952 laws bars Malaysians from adopting foreign babies, and parents who bought the infants in the past said it was easier than going through the government red tape to adopt Malaysian babies. There are no estimates of the number of babies adopted illegally.

Ban on teachers convicted of sex, drug offences: SACRAMENTO, California: Schoolteachers convicted of sex or drug crimes will be forever barred from California classrooms under a bill signed into law Monday by Gov. Pete Wilson, reports AP. Previously, teachers convicted of felonies could have their credentials restored after one year. The new law permanently revokes the credentials of teachers convicted of felony sex offenses of distributing drugs to minors. Four teachers convicted of sex or drug offences returned to the state's classrooms between 1989 and 1993, said Amador County Deputy District Attorney Vernon Pierson.

Asha Bhonsle, Pran honoured

CULCUTTA, Aug 30: Renowned play-back singer, Asha Bhonsle and noted actor, Pran have been selected by the All India Critics Association for the prestigious Kala Shriromani Award, reports AFP. According to an announcement made here today, both were selected for their life time achievement in music and films. Other eminent personalities selected for the awards are: Nirupa Roy (actress, Bombay), Girish Karnad (actor, Madras), Vyjantimala (dancer, Madras), Ananda Shankar (creative music, Calcutta), Ketaki Dutta (actress, Calcutta), Sandhya Rani (actress, Calcutta), Sunil Ganguly (literature, Calcutta), Hasrat Jaiपुरi (poet-Bombay), Debu Majumdar (film-critic, Delhi), Usha Uthup (vocalist, Calcutta) and Brojen Biswas (Tabla player-Calcutta). The awards will be presented at a luncheon in New Delhi next month.

UP Shiv Sena chief shot

NEW DELHI, Aug 30: A militant Hindu leader was in critical condition after being shot by gunmen in the northern Indian city of Kanpur late Monday, newspapers reported today, says AFP. Subodh Chopra was shot six times by an unspecified number of men riding in a car, the Times of India and other dailies said. Chopra was reportedly in critical condition in hospital. The attack sparked tension in Kanpur, an industrial centre some 400 kilometres (250 miles) southeast of the Indian capital, Kanpur city is located in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. Chopra was the president of the Uttar Pradesh chapter of Shiv Sena (Shiva's army), a militant Hindu group whose activists took part in the December 6, 1992 razing of the Babri Mosque in the town of Ayodhya.

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Khmers' deadline expires

PHNOM PENH, Aug 30: As the deadline to comply with Khmer Rouge demands of the release of three Western hostages passed Tuesday, a godfather of one of the men said he hoped it was not final, reports AP. "I'm not sure this date is definitive," Gerard Mouquin, 64, said in an interview. "Maybe we can open another round of negotiations." Mouquin flew in from France Monday to show moral support for Jean Michel Braquet, 27, who was seized July 26 along with Briton Mark Slater, 28, and Australian David Wilson, 29. The Khmer Rouge had originally demanded 150,000 dollars for their release but later said the governments of the three hostages must announce an end to military aid to Cambodia by August 30.

Julius Chan new Papuan PM

PORT MORESBY, Aug 30: Parliament elected Sir Julius Chan prime minister Tuesday after incumbent Patai Wingti withdrew from a leadership ballot ordered by the Supreme Court, reports AP. Officials said Chan, 55, won 69 votes to 32 from Bill Skate, who a few hours earlier resigned as speaker to contest the leadership. Chan, an Australian-educated moderate, returns to the top job 12 years after he was prime minister from 1980 to 1992. Wingti had served as prime minister, since 1992 as head of a coalition government made up of his People's Democratic Movement party and Chan's People's Progress Party. Chan had been foreign minister and deputy prime minister in Wingti's government.

Sudan to boycott Cairo confce

KHARTOUM, Aug 30: Sudan has decided to boycott the United Nations population conference due to be held next week in Cairo and called on others not to attend, state radio said today, reports Reuter. Sudan is the second Muslim country to say it will not take part in the UN conference on population and development due to open in Cairo on September 5. Earlier, Saudi Arabia said it would not go. Khartoum called for the formation of an international forum to counter the recommendations of the conference. Last week Sudanese President Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir criticised the conference saying its programme contradicted moral and religious values.

3 neo-Nazi leaders jailed

BERLIN, Aug 30: Three leaders of the neo-Nazi mob whose hateful "hunt for foreigners" in the eastern city of Magdeburg turned into a bloody melee were sentenced Tuesday to up to three years in jail, reports AP. The anti-foreigner riot May 12 grew out of a drunken hunt for Turks and was Germany's worst right-wing violence this year. The three-judge court convicted the three defendants, ages 21 to 23, of grievous breach of public order and sentenced them to terms ranging from 25 months to 3 years. Defence attorneys had sought acquittal and suspended sentences but prosecutors said a stiff sentence would send a strong message to "violent hooligans" whose attacks on foreigners persist four years after unification. The judges found the three defendants — carpenter's apprentice Heiko Kahle, waiter Steffen Schuette and railway worker Carlo Felgentrager — guilty of inciting the hunt for foreigners and taking part in the rampage. It was the second trial in the May 12 riot. Last month a juvenile court sentenced three youthful participants to up to 3 1/2 years in prison. Hunting for a group of Turks, the mob of about 30 rightists, shouting "hooligans for Germany!" and "Smash the Foreigners!" first encountered some black African men, whom they chased through a city center packed with pedestrians on Ascension Day afternoon.

Panamanian president steps down

PANAMA CITY, Aug 30: President Guillermo Endara steps down Wednesday, leaving a stable Panama but a legacy of weak leadership and overlooked public policy, reports AP. Endara ends his term having overseen some of the cleanest elections in Panama's history and by offering to collaborate with the new government if it would benefit the country. The out-going president, who did not seek re-election, turns his office over to Ernesto Perez Balladares, a member of Noriega's party. Endara has bought an apartment in the exclusive ocean-view section of Punto Patilla and says he will return to his law practice.