

BRIEFLY

Nepali PM due in India Monday: Nepalese Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari will start a five-day official visit to India from April 10, reports Xinhua from New Delhi.

According to local press reports, during the visit the two sides will hold discussions on the Indo-Nepal friendship treaty, tariff concession to the kingdom and matters relating to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

TV cameraman killed in Burundi: A South African television cameraman, Francis Vincent, and a Burundian student acting as his interpreter were killed in an ambush near in Bujumbura late on Thursday, radio Burundi reported. AFP says from Bujumbura.

Vincent, who worked for the British television agency World Television News (WTN), and his companion were apparently killed by extremist Hutu militia after their vehicle was ambushed.

UN to retain mission in Somalia: The UN Security Council said on Thursday it would retain a small political mission in Somalia to keep up international efforts towards bringing peace to the African nation, AFP reports from United Nations.

In a declaration adopted unanimously, the council said the mission would be mandated to help all Somali sides, find out common ground and build national reconciliation.

Egyptian police kill 4 rebels: Police killed four suspected Muslim extremists on Thursday during a sweep of a militant stronghold in southern Egypt. Two policemen were wounded, AP reports from Cairo.

The shooting erupted when police descended on sugarcane fields surrounding the village of Mantout in Minya province, 135 miles (220 kilometres) south of Cairo, police said.

Yemen to demobilise 50,000 troops: Yemen is to demobilise around 50,000 soldiers as part of austerity measures to overcome its economic crisis, President Ali Abdullah Saleh announced on Thursday, AFP reports from Sanaa.

"We have decided within the framework of economic reforms to demobilise and retire some 50,000 soldiers," he said.

DPRK conducts missile test: North Korea conducted a short-range missile test in late March by firing it into the Sea of Japan, a Japanese government spokesman said on Friday, AP report from Tokyo.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Kozo Igarashi said the latest test was a short-range missile and was part of North Korea's normal training.

4 Nigerians beheaded in KSA: Four Nigerians were beheaded in the Red Sea city of Jeddah on Thursday for drug trafficking, raising to 66 the number of people executed in Saudi Arabia so far this year compared to 58 in the whole of 1994, AFP reports from Riyadh.

The Interior Ministry said two of the convicted traffickers were caught bringing heroin into the country, hidden in their stomachs the other two were convicted for trying to sell drugs.

Czech President in Singapore: Czech President Vaclav Havel arrived in Singapore yesterday for a two-day working visit which is likely to concentrate on economic and trade issues, Reuter reports from Singapore.

Havel was accompanied by Minister of Industry and Trade Vladimir Dlouhy, as well as the head of the Czech National Bank and a deputy foreign minister.

12 killed in Indian bus crash: At least 12 passengers were killed when their bus crashed into a tree near Una, in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh after its brakes failed, Press Trust of India (PTI) said yesterday, reports Reuter from New Delhi.

PTI said nine people were killed instantly, two died on their way to the hospital and another died later in hospital. The bus driver and conductor were among several others injured in the accident, it added.

Kurd rocket kills 8 in N Iraq: Kurdish rebels from Turkey opened rocket fire on a taxi and killed eight local Kurds in northern Iraq, it was reported on Friday, AP says from Ankara.

The attack occurred on Thursday evening near the town of Zakho, Necip Calin, a local Iraqi Kurdish security chief, said. The victims of the rocket attack included four children and one woman, Calin said.

Heroin seized in Singapore: Police seized 7.1 kilograms (15 pounds) of heroin from a Malaysian man's car in one of the largest drug seizures in years, it was reported on Friday, AP says from Singapore.

Fifteen packets of the drug were discovered in several compartments of the car on Thursday as it was being checked at a customs barrier on a highway from Malaysia, the Straits Times newspaper said. It said the narcotics has a street value of about 1.4 million Singapore dollars (dls 1 million).

4 die as boat sinks in Black Sea: A Georgian fishing boat sank in a Black Sea storm, and four of the 15 crew members were killed and another man was missing, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported on Friday, AP says from Krasnodar, Russia.

The Russian coast guard rescued the other 10 men on Thursday from a raft near where the seiner went under, 13 kilometres (eight miles) offshore near the settlement of Arkhipo-Osipovka in Russia's Krasnodar region.

Russia to assist Sudanese army: Sudan and Russia on Thursday agreed to resume military cooperation suspended since 1971, a Sudanese armed forces spokesman said, AFP reports from Khartoum.

Russia had agreed to assist the Sudanese army in the technical field and in training, and to revive previous military agreements, during four days of talks in Khartoum involving Sudanese and Russian armed forces delegations.

Palestinian boy killed in blast: A 10-year-old Palestinian boy was killed today in an explosion as he tended his sheep in the Hebron region of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, hospital workers said, AFP reports from Hebron, West Bank.

Yusef Hamadeh was in a field used at times by the Israeli army for training exercises. It was not immediately clear what type of device caused the explosion.

Benazir's efforts draw widespread support

US officials, lawmakers for repeal of Pressler Amendment

WASHINGTON, Apr 7: Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's efforts to have a US law banning aid to Pakistan repealed have drawn widespread support from US government officials, lawmakers and business leaders, reports AFP.

Republican Senate majority leader Bob Dole said he was impressed with Benazir's arguments for lifting the so-called Pressler Amendment, and corporate executives who signed 60 investment agreements with Pakistan said there was growing awareness of the negative impact of the sanctions.

Benazir, on the fourth day of a 10-day visit to the United States, is scheduled to meet today with Defence Secretary William Perry, who has just returned from a tour of former Soviet republics.

High up on their agenda will likely figure 28F-16 fighter jets which Pakistan has

paid 658 million dollars for but which have not been delivered since the Pressler Amendment was passed in 1990.

The subjects sure to come up again when Benazir meets on Monday here with US President Bill Clinton, who earlier this week said that Washington should "review the policy" and determine whether the law is achieving its objectives or whether the two countries would be a stronger force for peace without it.

The amendment was approved after then President George Bush was unable to certify that Pakistan was not pursuing a nuclear weapons programme in response to fears that India — the neighbour with which it has fought three wars — has nuclear weapons.

The United States is also interested in gaining Pakistan's support for an indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

(NPT), which comes up for renewal next month and will be debated by its 175 signatories starting April 17 at UN headquarters in New York.

Pakistan is among a handful of developing nations opposed to the NPT's extension.

Benazir has insisted that she shared with the United States a desire for non-proliferation, but said, "unfortunately the Pressler Amendment is standing in the way of non-proliferation."

Perry has called the embargo a "blunt instrument" that undercuts US influence in Pakistan while hindering efforts to avert a nuclear arms race in South Asia.

The ground swell of support for repealing the Pressler Amendment was underlined on Thursday when big-name US companies like IBM and General Electric joined smaller business in signing 60

agreements for investment projects in Pakistan totalling six billion dollars.

The deals announced were mostly in the areas of telecommunications, oil and gas, power and railways, said Pakistani Water and Power Minister Salman Faruqi at a huge dinner to fete hundreds of officials and chief executive officers.

On hand at the signing of the investment deals was Robert McFarland, former President Ronald Reagan's national security adviser who now represents United States Medical International.

Asked whether the political situation could affect investment in Pakistan, McFarland insisted that the country was fundamentally stable and that the growing sentiment in Congress to modify the Pressler Amendment reflects that.

Serbs rocket houses in Bosnian govt-held area

SARAJEVO, Apr 7: A rocket slammed into several houses in a government-held suburb in Sarajevo today and hospital staff said it killed one person and wounded several reports Reuter.

"At 8.40 this morning one self-propelled rocket was fired from (Serb-held) Ildza on to Hrasnica centre," said UN spokeswoman Captain Miriam Souchaki.

Staff at a hospital in Hrasnica said the attack killed one person and wounded several.

UN military observers reported that the rocket hit a residential area in territory held by the Muslim-led Bosnian government, damaging seven houses.

"Witnesses said they heard a loud explosion and that four of hoses were destroyed."

It was the second day running that Hrasnica has come under attack, apparently by Serb forces besieging the Bosnian capital Hrasnica lies at the foot of a mountain supply route which forms Serb-besieged Sarajevo's only land link to the outside world.

Bosnian Serbs fired mortar bombs at Hrasnica on Thursday, killing two men and wounding four other people.

Serb forces have responded to government army offensives in north and central Bosnia by shelling civilian targets in UN protected areas.

The Serb shelling attacks flout UN authority, as the Security Council has banned heavy weapons from a 20 km (12 mile) radius around Sarajevo.

Meanwhile aircraft of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) made warning passes over Bosnian Serb-held territory near Sarajevo late Thursday after the Serbs destroyed a mini-bus amid escalating ceasefire violations a UN spokesman said.

Major Pierre Chavancy said the "dissuasive presence" requested by the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) lasted about 10 minutes from around 11:00 pm (2100 GMT) and did not include any ground strikes.

French UNPROFOR troops also fired warning shots at Serb positions.



World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General Hiroshi Nakajima (L) tries to convince a Chinese baby to have anti-polio vaccine on Friday during his visit to a vaccination and education stand at Beijing's Tiananmen Square to mark the World Health Day. China's goal is to wipe out polio by the end of 1995, while WHO has set 2000 as the deadline for wiping out the crippling disease worldwide. — AFP/UNB photo

Israel to build new houses in West Bank

JERUSALEM, Apr 7: Israel's Housing Ministry plans to build thousands of new houses in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, a government official said on Thursday report Reuter.

The Housing Ministry will propose building about 1,300 units in Matityahu, about 3,000 in Maale Adumim, and about 800 apartments in Givat Zeev, said the official, who spoken on condition he not be identified.

He said, a special cabinet committee would review the plan next week.

Palestinians view new settlement construction as a main stumbling block to Israeli-PLO peace talks.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who defeated the hard-line Likud Party in a 1992 election in which he had promised a freeze on settlement building, has since said construction will on the borders of the West Bank.

LTTE expecting govt team for talks Apr 10

COLOMBO, Apr 7: Sri Lankan Tamil rebels are expecting a ministerial team for peace talks in their Jaffna stronghold on April 10, rebel-controlled newspapers in the north reported today, says Reuter.

The Jaffna papers are saying that the LTTE is expecting a government team to come up on the 10th, a resident in the northern town said. Vabuniya government officials were not available for comment. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been fighting a 12-year war for an independent homeland in the north and east.

7 of a family killed in Bihar

JAMSHEDPUR, Apr 7: Seven members of a family including five children were killed and their 18-year-old daughter was gangraped by armed miscreants at Padia village in Chakradharpur subdivision of Bihar on Monday last, a delayed official report said here today, says PTI.

The family members were kidnapped by a gang of 15-20 persons on Monday while seven of them were killed and buried under the river bed. Their daughter fell unconscious after being raped. The miscreants did not kill her, thinking her to be dead.

After regaining consciousness, the girl took shelter in a nearby village and informed the village chief the next day, who alongwith the village sarpanch informed the Chakradharpur police station

Off the Record

Hormone-free contraceptive pill for both sexes

COPENHAGEN: Danish scientists said on Thursday they had made a discovery which holds out promise of developing a hormone-free contraceptive pill for men as well as for women and of improved treatment of infertility, reports Reuter.

Researchers from Danish biotechnology firm Novo Nordisk and the University Hospital of Copenhagen said they discovered group of compounds named MAS (Meiosis-Activating Sterols).

The compounds are present in women's ovaries and in male testes. Under normal circumstances, the compounds will induce the egg to complete meiosis, the cell division which results in halving the genetic material.

Meiosis is a prerequisite for fertilisation of the egg cell. In men, MAS stimulates the formation of sperm cells.

It seems likely that it will become possible in the longer term to block MAS, thereby preventing unwanted pregnancy," a Novo Nordisk statement said.

"Perhaps we are moving towards a novel, hormone-free contraceptive pill that can be used by both men and women," it said.

China's Bermuda Triangle

BEIJING: A poisonous cloud produced by rotting plants is behind the mysterious disappearance of hundreds of people in the area known as "China's Bermuda Triangle," according to a scientific survey, reports AFP.

"Decaying plants in black bamboo ravine, in the southwestern province of Sichuan, produce a 'poisonous miasma' that accumulates in the air, 'suffocating people and making them fall into the abyss,'" the Xinhua news agency said, citing the survey's findings.

The ravine, located in a remote, cold and mountainous area, also exerts a strong magnetic force capable of disabling compasses and causing plane crashes, according to the 50 scientists who carried out the first large-scale study of the area.

In the most famous incident, 100 nationalist soldiers fighting the communists fled to the ravine in 1950 and vanished.

In the same year, a private plane piloted by an American businessman crashed there. The cause of the crash was never determined.

In 1962, five geologists and one of their two guides disappeared after penetrating the ravine.

The surviving guide said the group was suddenly enveloped in thick fog and heard "roaring noises." When the fog lifted the other six members of the party had disappeared.

The survey also pointed out that the complex topography of the area could easily cause people to lose their way and fall into one of the ravine's many hidden rivers.

Perfect love story

MISSION VIEJO: It was the perfect love story. A man receives a kidney from his wife a month after their hospital wedding ceremony. His health improves, his balding head sprouts hair for the first time in years and his face develops a robust glow, reports AP.

Now, however, the picture is not so perfect. Once again, Randall Curlee has been rendered blind by advanced diabetes.

Curlee, who could have died without the November transplant, first was diagnosed with diabetes as a teenager. Although the disease has caused him to suffer bouts of blindness in the past, he had hoped the transplant would stop that condition.

But last weekend he was returned to a world of darkness, his blindness triggered by a hemorrhaging of the retinas. Now his wife has resigned herself to believing that one day he will be permanently blind.

"When I really realised he was blind, I didn't want to believe it. Now, I have to be his Seeing Eye dog as well," Victoria Ingram-Curlee said. "I have to drive him wherever he needs to go. I have to work around that, and my own life is very busy."

After the transplant, Curlee, 46, returned to work as a marketing director. In addition to taking insulin at least twice a day, he takes three strong anti-rejection drugs.

Now he's trying to cope with not being able to see things. Elizabeth Catton, the transplant coordinator at Sharp Memorial Hospital in San Diego, where the surgery took place, had counseled the Curlees about the pros and cons of the procedure.

Conservatives suffer setback in Scottish local polls

LONDON, Apr 7: The Labour opposition made sweeping gains in Scottish local elections today as the ruling Conservatives faced the prospect of an electoral wipe-out, with not a single council under their overall control, reports AFP.

Early results also suggested that support for the Liberal Democrats, Britain's second major opposition party, had crumbled.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) vote appeared to have held, but had not made the breakthrough hoped for by the nationalists.

A BBC projection predicted Labour would finish with 48 per cent of the Scottish vote, the SNP 26 per cent, the Tories 12 per cent and the Liberal Democrats six per cent.

For the Tories that would be their worst local election performance in Scotland since 1974.

The one council the Conservatives had any realistic hopes of winning, East Renfrewshire, ended up under no overall control. And another flagship Tory authority, Stirling, fell to Labour.

Opposition Labour leader Tony Blair was quick to hail a

night of Labour success. "As the results come in it is clear it is another great night for the Labour Party, a disappointment for the nationalists and a disaster for the Tories."

Meanwhile, Bill Aitken, the first Conservative candidate to win a seat in Glasgow council elections, admitted: "We face a lot of bad news tonight. I have little doubt that there will be great bitterness on the part of many Tory candidates up and down the country who feel that they have been sold short by the government and the antics over the last few weeks."



Cambodian de-miners prepare several hundred artillery shells and unexploded ordnance (UXO) for demolition on Thursday near historic Siem Reap. The French organisation COFRAS has cleared more than 2,300 landmines and 10,000 UXO during their 22 month-long mission. — AFP/UNB photo

Catholic schools in Delhi closed

NEW DELHI, Apr 7: Catholic schools were closed here today and nearly 200 Indian Catholics staged a demonstration to protest against last week's attack on five nuns in the nearby city of Ghazabad, organisers said, reports AFP.

The demonstrators, who included nuns and priests, gathered in a downtown New Delhi park praying, singing and chanting slogans such as "Christians unite" and "Long live Christians," witnesses said.

The five nuns, members of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary of Angels, were hospitalised in serious condition here after being assaulted with sticks and iron rods at their Ghazabad hostel on Saturday.

Rwanda begins trials of thousands charged with bloodletting

KIGALI, Apr 7: Rwanda on Thursday began trying the first of tens of thousands imprisoned for the tide of ethnic bloodletting last year that killed at least a half million people, reports AP.

Six defendants accused of genocide went on trial Thursday. They are among 30,000 people, mostly of the majority Hutu group, jailed on suspicion of participating in the systematic rampage against Rwanda's minority Tutsis.

Those blamed for organising the slaughter have not yet been brought to trial.

Dressed in dingy pink prison clothes, the six defendants faces cringed in fear as Prosecutor Silas Munyagishali read the murder charges against them.

After a 45-minute hearing on Thursday, a three-judge panel delayed the trial because the prosecutor wanted time to investigate the cases against the six, as did a lawyer representing the youngest defendant, a 17-year-old boy.

Dozens of onlookers crammed into the back of the Kigali's Nyamirambo courtroom, anxious to see the accused prosecuted.

"They can't let them go because they killed our parents and our brothers," said Ahmed Jamil, a 21-year-old born in Uganda to Rwanda Tutsis who fled ethnic hatred in the 1960s. "The people cannot forgive."

The crowd cheered as the accused were loaded into the back of a green pickup truck guarded by three armed soldiers and driven back to Kigali's central prison.

The massacres, many carried out with machetes, began last April 7 hours after the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana in a mysterious plane crash the night before.

Nearly 500,000 were killed and millions fled the country, crowding camps in neighbouring countries. The slaughter ended with the Tutsi-led rebel Rwandan Patriot Front victory over the government in July.

Most of the 30,000 people in jail on suspicion of participating in the genocide will be charged with murder because Rwanda does not have a statute on genocide. Prosecutor Mun-

yagishali, however, said he will make use of a UN convention against genocide, which Rwanda signed in 1975.

On trial Thursday were: Christian Bigirimana, Stanislaw Hittimana, Musoro Ndura, Murekarubanze, Patrice Munyagishali, and the youngest, Nkulkikiyigoma Ngomayubu. The 17-year-old Hutu is charged with killing six people and throwing them into a river in his hometown of Gitarama. He faces 20 years in prison.

Theophile Kazenza is defending the job on behalf of UNICEF; a boy he admits is risky because most of his fellow Tutsis do not believe the boy or his co-defendants deserve a trial.

"But it is a risk that must be taken in the cause of justice,"

Kazenza said. No one has agreed to defend the others.

The defendants face life in prison or the death penalty. Rwanda has not executed anyone since a convicted murderer and robber was killed by a firing squad in 1983.

The opening of the trial — the first since the civil war — was best by difficulties. First, the truck that was to deliver the accused from prison broke down, then the military expressed concern about security at the bullet-scarred courthouse.

But Francoise Bouchet Saulnier, legal advisor for the French aid group Doctors Without Borders, said the real problem was that the Rwandan

judicial system was destroyed by the war.

Many judges were killed or fled and those who remain "are working in a very lonely place and in a terrible atmosphere," she said.

Most of all, judges need a guarantee that they are immune from punishment for their decisions. One Kigali judge disappeared after fleeing 40 Hutus from prison for lack of evidence, and two judges criticised following unpopular decisions are now imprisoned.

"Justice cannot flourish in a place like this," Saulnier said.

She blamed the international community, specifically the United Nations, for failing to keep its promise to rebuild the judicial system.

China to allow HIV carriers at women's confce

BEIJING, Apr 7: China will allow carriers of the HIV virus that leads to AIDS to attend the UN world women's conference here in September, Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian said today, reports AFP.

Labelling reports that delegates carrying the Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus would be barred from entering the country as "groundless," Chen said China would operate a policy of not checking delegates health cards.

A similar quarantine policy was adopted for the 1990 Asian Games in Beijing and the Far East and South Pacific Games for the disabled last year.