

BRIEFLY



Sarajevo residents run across a street as snipers open fire on them Thursday during UN special envoy Yesushi Akashi's visit in the Bosnian capital. —AFP/UNB photo

Princes Diana in HK: Britain's Princess Diana, the estranged wife of Prince Charles, arrived in Hong Kong yesterday for a private weekend visit in support of charity, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Governor Chris Patten greeted the Princess of Wales at the Britain colony's airport before she headed off to her first function, a gala fund-raising dinner for a leprosy mission in China.

Libya won't sign NPT: Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has announced that Libya will not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Xinhua reports from Tunis.

The Libyan news agency today quoted Gaddafi as saying in a speech made Thursday evening at a mass rally in the northwestern Libyan town of Ghadamis that Libya's refusal to sign the NPT is prompted by two reasons. He said that firstly "Libya does not contemplate the production of atomic weapons," and secondly "Israel has not and will not sign the treaty."

UNHCR chief gets Liberty Medal: Sadako Ogata of Japan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has been selected to receive the 1995 Liberty Medal, the international selection commission announced on Thursday, Reuters reports from Philadelphia.

The medal and a 100,000 dollar prize will be presented on July 4th at Independence Hall to the woman described as the world's greatest advocate for refugees.

17 drown in eastern India: At least 17 people drowned in the Hooghly river in eastern India after a thunderstorm rocked the jetty on which they were standing, the United News of India said on Friday, Reuters reports from New Delhi.

The news agency said the victims, including three women and three children, were waiting to board a boat on Thursday on the river near Calcutta. Sixteen people were rescued and taken to hospital, UNI said.

5 more executed in Singapore: Singapore hanged five convicted drug traffickers in the early Friday morning, a Prison Department spokesman said, Reuters reports from Singapore.

Among the executed three were from Hong Kong. They were two women — 24-year old Tong China Man and 22 year old Poon Yuen Chung and one man 25-year old Lam Cheuk Wang.

Over 20 die in Chinese storm: More than 20 people were killed this week in a fierce storm that swept Guangdong province in southern China, a Hong Kong press report said on Friday, AFP says from Hong Kong.

The deadly mix of torrential rain, high winds and hail stones on Wednesday also left more than 300 people injured, the pro-Beijing Wen Wei Po newspaper said, quoting Chinese officials.

Blast claims 3 in Russia: Three people were killed and two others badly wounded after a grenade exploded in an apartment building in downtown Moscow, an official confirmed on Friday, AP reports from Moscow.

Thursday evening's blast "was caused by negligence during the handling of a combat hand grenade," Vladimir Shulga, a spokesman for Russian Interior Ministry said.

Strong quake rocks Philippines: A powerful earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale rocked the eastern Philippines on Friday, cutting power and sending several aftershocks that caused residents to flee homes and offices, seismologists and witnesses said, AFP reports from Manila.

There were no immediate reports of any casualties. The official Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) said it expected some damage from the temblor, which was caused by a movement in the Philippine trench off the eastern side of the archipelago.

Blast kills 2 in Greece: An explosion killed two people on Thursday in an Athens suburb, but police said it apparently was not an attack on the home of the Saudi Arabian ambassador just down the street, AP reports from Athens.

The head of the Athens security police, Christos Keramidis, said the explosion was caused by a hand grenade. He said the grenade, held by Ioannis Markovic, the owner of an English-language tutoring school, went off when Spiros Benetos, a Greek navy commander, opened the front door of his house. Both men were killed instantly.

7 German Nazi supporters freed: Seven young rightists were released Thursday after spending the night in prison for marching through this eastern German city shouting Nazi slogans, AP reports from Saalfeld.

Prosecutors have started criminal proceedings against the seven for slander and use of forbidden symbols. Displaying Nazi symbols is outlawed in Germany.

10 Europeans freed in Sierra Leone: Ten Europeans freed by rebels in the West African state of Sierra Leone were heading for the Guinean capital on Friday after being handed over to the Red Cross, Reuters reports from Freetown.

The rebels released 16 captives who included six Britons, three Swiss, one German and six locals on the border with Guinea in Sierra Leone's eastern Kailahun district.

Kozyrev threatens 'use of force' to defend national interests

MOSCOW, Apr 21: Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev is, as one TV commentator put it Thursday, in top form. With just a few choice words — Russia will use its armed might to defend its interests and compatriots abroad — he has the former Soviet Union in an uproar, reports AP.

"What are the army and the navy for," Kozyrev said Thursday, professing bewilderment at the fuss, "if they can't protect our citizens and our interests?"

Kozyrev's use-of-force declaration — first uttered Tuesday at a defence and foreign policy council meeting, widely reported and since reiterated several times — have provoked leaders from the Baltics to Central Asia.

On Thursday, Ukraine entered the fray, testily demanding an "explanation" from Moscow. Kiev was hard on the heels of the tiny Baltic nations, chronically suspicious of Moscow's imperial ambitions.

"Threatening the use of force against sovereign states is not in accordance with international standards of behavior," the Estonian Foreign Ministry said Wednesday.

The former Soviet republics in Central Asia were also edgy. Kozyrev met with foreign ministers of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan Thursday to defend his stance.

A day earlier, the Tajik opposition had a stormed out of peace negotiations with the hard-line government after Kozyrev opened the talks by threatening to send in Russian troops.

The opposition delegation returned, but only at the strong urging of a UN special envoy and several foreign ambassadors.

"Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev is in top form," said Nikolai Svanidze, who had Kozyrev on his programme "Details" on Russian Television Thursday.

"We're all for peaceful settlements, for settling problems through negotiations," Kozyrev

said. "But when there is no other choice, in my opinion, then we have to use force."

As he spoke, the camera panned to a document on the table in front of him. "Selected list of Comments by US Political Leaders on Using Force to Defend National Interest," it said in large letters.

On the larger world stage, Russia has grown increasingly testy with NATO. Defence Minister Pavel Grachev said Russia might defy conventional arms limitations treaties if NATO expanded eastward. The Foreign Ministry has since endorsed his stand.

Russia and the United States are also at loggerheads over Russia's decision to build a nuclear power plant for Iran.

President Bill Clinton has said he will be "quite aggressive" in pressing President Boris Yeltsin to cancel the deal. If Kozyrev is a bellwether, Clinton might be in for a chilly reception at the summit next month in Moscow.

Closer to home, Russia's neighbours are understandably nervous.

When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, more than 20 million ethnic Russians suddenly found themselves citizens of other countries. New nations like the Baltics, Ukraine or Kazakhstan found themselves with large Russian communities. In some places, ethnic Russians even from a majority.

Their fate has become a favourite rallying cry for ultra-nationalists and superpatriots who long for the revival of the Russian empire — or at least the Soviet Union.

"What I am talking about is 180 degrees from these appeals to use force to satisfy imperial ambitions or for punishment," Kozyrev insisted Thursday in the TV interview.

But Moscow has not been shy about using its considerable armed force. It has troops in hot spots throughout the former Soviet Union and is often accused of using them to advance its own interests.

Off the Record



American singer Janet Jackson in concert on Wednesday at Wembley Arena, UK. —AFP/UNB photo

The bird has its say

MELBOURNE, Australia: He said the bird was his. She said the bird was hers. So a judge considered what the bird had to say — and awarded custody to the woman, reports AP.

The battle over a pet cockatoo was resolved Friday after a policeman testified he heard the bird use phrases it learned from its former owners.

Two families in suburban Melbourne each claimed the pink-and-gray bird was theirs — and the matter went before the Broadmeadows Magistrates' Court.

Carmen Ferreira told the court her pet, Racquel, disappeared two years ago and that she heard it earlier this week calling "Hello, Racquel" from a nearby house.

Ignazio Vargou' said the bird was named Michel and he had bought it at a market more than three years ago.

Magistrate Bernard Coburn ruled that Racquel and Michel were the same bird and ordered it returned to Mrs. Ferreira.

He cited the bird's vocabulary as the basis of his decision.

Senior Constable John Cooke testified he heard the bird say "Hello Racquel, Hello Sean," — the name of Mrs. Ferreira's grandson — and other phrases the Ferraires had taught it.

The cockatoo was perched in the courtroom during proceedings.

Mothers' little saviours

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Supreme Court has ordered the release of jailed mothers suckling babies, the attorney-general's office said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

A statement from the office said the order was issued on Wednesday in a human rights case on the welfare of breastfeeding babies of convicted mothers or those awaiting trial in the central province of Punjab.

The statement did not give the number of women who could immediately benefit from the court order or explain whether it would apply only to Punjab or all of Pakistan's four provinces.

The Islamabad newspaper The Muslim said there were 156 suckling babies and 69 pregnant women now in Pakistani jails.

In response to a court notice, Attorney-General Qazi Mohammad Jamil told the court "there were sufficient provisions in law as well as in Sharia (Islamic law) whereby the court and the government can suspend the sentence of women having suckling babies."

Ghali arrives in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Apr 21: UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali arrived in Indonesia today to help commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Asia-Africa conference in the hilltown of Bandung, reports Reuters.

Boutros-Ghali arrived at Jakarta International Airport on a commercial flight on the first leg of a tour that will also take him to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji.

He will then fly to Paris and Moscow to attend parades marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

Kuwait's Emir denies unrest

KUWAIT, Apr 21: The Emir has denied that a crisis is brewing between Kuwait's government and the opposition-dominated Parliament, reports AP.

Those who bet that a crisis is at hand in Kuwait are wrong, if not ill-intentioned," Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah told the London-based Al-Hawadeth magazine, in an interview to be published Friday.

The official Kuwait News Agency ran excerpts from the interview Thursday.

The emirate's first post-war legislature has been locked in bitter argument with the cabinet for some time over parliament's right to review laws passed between 1986, when the assembly was suspended for criticising the government, and 1992, when it was restored.

Troops kill 20 Rwandans

KIGALI, Apr 21: Troops killed at least 20 people and wounded 50 at an overcrowded camp for Hutus in southwestern Rwanda, UN and aid agency officials said on Friday, reports Reuters.

They said shooting erupted late on Thursday at Kibeho camp and initial reports said government troops first shot in the air then fired into the crowd when displaced Hutus, who left their homes during civil war last year, threw stones at them.

The officials, who declined to be identified, said at least 20 people were killed and another 50 were wounded and aid workers were trying to reach the camp to treat the casualties.

Ten displaced people from Rwanda's Hutu majority were killed in a stampede at Kibeho on Tuesday when Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) troops cordoned off the camp and fired into the air.

Lankan navy attacks LTTE base

COLOMBO, Apr 21: The Sri Lankan navy attacked a Tamil guerilla base in the northern rebel stronghold of Jaffna today, its first strike since the rebels ended a truce by sinking two navy gunboats, navy officials said, reports Reuters.

They said navy gunboats and patrol craft bombarded the rebel naval base close to point Pedro on the northeastern tip of the Jaffna peninsula at dawn.

No details of casualties or damage were immediately available.

The government had said the military would not launch major offensives in retaliation for Wednesday's surprise rebel attack, which killed 12 sailors in the eastern port of Trincomalee.

The government described the rebel attack as only a temporary setback to the peace process and said it was trying to restore contact with the rebels to prevent further war.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels claimed responsibility for an attack, which ended a 14-week truce meant to facilitate peace talks to end the island's 120-year ethnic conflict in which more than 30,000 people have been killed.

But military officials said they had resumed limited operations to defend their camps and dominate surrounding areas.

On Thursday, a navy patrol blew up two rebel craft off Jaffna where a fishing ban was restored after the Trincomalee attack, a military spokesman said.

"The navy patrol detected two boats and opened up with her main armament destroying them," he said. "Enemy casualties are not known."

Police meanwhile said they had arrested up to 90 Tamils in Colombo suspected of having links with the rebels since they resumed house-to-house searches on Thursday.

US may seek tighter UN sanctions on Libya

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 21: The United States said Thursday it may seek tighter UN sanctions against Libya after a Libyan airliner flew pilgrims to Saudi Arabia in defiance of the sanctions, reports AP.

A US official, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity, said Wednesday's flight was a violation of the sanctions and that the solution was to tighten them.

He said the United States would consult with other UN Security Council members to see what action might be taken.

Washington has called for a worldwide embargo on Libyan oil sales but has repeatedly failed to get council backing, most recently last month. Major Libyan oil customers, including France and Italy, oppose the move.

The Security Council president, Karel Kovanda, said the Libyan airliner's flight was "a flagrant violation of the sanctions that reflected 'an in-your-face attitude by Libya.'"

He said he expects the council to pursue the matter but did not say what action it might take.

The council has not determined whether Egypt or Saudi Arabia broke the international ban on Libyan flights, Kovanda said.

The Libyan airliner crossed Egyptian airspace and, according to a Libyan Airways official in Cairo, was not prevented from taking off again by Saudi Arabia.

Both countries were being asked for information on what happened, the US official said.

Vaccine to stop blood cancer

LONDON, Apr 21: American doctors said today, they had developed a vaccine that stopped a deadly blood cancer from killing a woman, by using her brother's bone marrow, reports Reuters.

Dr Larry Kwak and colleagues at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland said their new technique destroyed malignant myeloma cells.

Their method helped them immunise the woman, 43, against her own cancer cells, they wrote in The Lancet medical journal.

The technique involved transplantation of bone marrow from the woman's 47-year-old brother. The Lancet said in a statement ahead of publication.



Two US Park Service employees lower the fifty flags surrounding the Washington Monument Thursday. US President Bill Clinton ordered the flags lowered as a sign of mourning for the victims of the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Wednesday. —AFP/UNB photo

Tito partisan — turned — dissident dies

BELGRADE, Apr 21: Yugoslavia's best-known dissident Milovan Djilas, died on Thursday at the age of 83. Djilas tasted power and suffered punishment from a communist system he helped to create but then rejected, reports Reuters.

Once a favoured deputy of communist state founder Josip Broz Tito, and his ally during Yugoslavia's traumatic break with Moscow in 1948, Djilas fell from grace when he publicly criticised Tito's policies.

Tito disowned Djilas who spent the rest of his life as a political outcast, renouncing his former Marxist convictions and writing works of dissent. He forecast catastrophe for Yugoslavia unless it let democratic political opposition develop.

For more than 30 years after his fall in January 1954 Djilas was shunned by Yugoslav officials. Other dissidents and human rights activists were also leery of a man who had zealously promoted Tito's drive against state enemies after World War II.

But while a pariah at home he found fame in the West through several works on the Tito years of power in which he drew on his inside knowledge of political manoeuvring in the post-war years.

In his final years, he saw the country he had fought for during the war engulfed in bloody ethnic conflict, after the Republics of Croatia and Bosnia broke with the Yugoslav Federation.

Looking back on three decades of dissent, nine of them in jail, he had told a western reporter: "I am content with my destiny. I regret nothing."

He retained a grudging respect for Tito and praised the 1948 break with Moscow as a

major achievement. He outlived his former patron who died in May 1980 as well as Edvard Kardelj and Alexander Rankovic who, with Djilas, formed Tito's post-war inner clique.

Born on June 12, 1911 in the mountain republic of Montenegro, Djilas threw himself into communist agitation as a teenager. Jailed by the pre-war royalist authorities, he emerged from prison a full-time Marxist revolutionary.

In World War II he fought as one of Tito's partisans and was one of the leader's main propagandists through some of the darkest moments of post-war Yugoslav history.

Even in later years he was reluctant to express regret over the arbitrary execution by the communist of thousands of Yugoslavs presumed to have been collaborators.

He visited the former Soviet Union several times in the immediate post-war years and spoke Russian more fluently than English. But when the break came with Moscow in 1948 no one fought harder to justify Yugoslavia's independent path.

By 1953 he had become one of three vice-presidents and was seen as a possible successor to Tito. But he said in later life that he had already begun questioning one-party rule.

In late 1953 he published a series of articles criticising the totalitarian nature of the party establishment under Tito. In January 1954 Djilas was dropped from the Communist Party Central Committee and some months later returned his party card, becoming a political outcast overnight.

His first major work "The New Class," published in New York in 1957, earned him a nine-year prison sentence.

Moscow for unconditional talks with Chechen rebels

MOSCOW, Apr 21: The Russian government wants to hold talks with Chechen rebel military commanders without preconditions to end the conflict in the Caucasus republic, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said today, reports AP.

Itar-Tass news agency said, "Chernomyrdin called for talks with the command of the armed formations opposing federal troops in Chechnya with a view to achieving an accord to end hostilities on both sides without preconditions."

The appeal was read out at a conference on national reconciliation which opened in the Chechen capital Grozny today, bringing together 350 elders, religious and public figures from all over Chechnya.

Chernomyrdin also said there would be "no persecution and no repression."

The Russian government "guarantees an amnesty to those who were deceived and joined the armed militia," he said.

Interfax news agency quoted Chechen military sources as saying Russian forces were massing around the western mountain village of Bamut, where sporadic exchanges of fire continued today.

They said Russian units were moving into the area from the southeast, while the positions on the front line remained static.

On Thursday Interfax reported that Chechen guerillas were raining down mortar and machine-gun fire from surrounding hills as Russian forces fought to consolidate control of Bamut, the last separatist lowland stronghold.

Reuters adds: Russian forces are struggling to wipe out rebel resistance in Chechnya.

DPRK rules out further talks with US

BERLIN, Apr 21: North Korea has ruled out resuming deadlocked talks with the United States on salvaging a landmark nuclear accord before its negotiating team heads home today, a spokesman for Pyongyang's mission in Berlin said, reports Reuters.

The spokesman said senior North Korean negotiator Kim Jongu would hold a news conference at 4.30 pm (1430 GMT) and then proceed to the airport to head back to Pyongyang.

Asked if Kim would meet US negotiators in Berlin again before leaving, the spokesman said: "That is ruled out."

The Berlin talks ran around over how to implement a 4.5 billion dollar accord struck last October that Washington hoped would divert communist North Korea from building nuclear weapons.

Pyongyang agreed to shut down and eventually dismantle its graphite-moderated reactor in return for getting more modern plants and interim energy supplies, but it balked at Seoul's demands that it play the lead role in supplying the new light-water reactor from which it is harder to extract plutonium, a key ingredient in nuclear bombs.

3 Algerian army officers killed

PARIS, Apr 21: Three senior Algerian army officers, a general and two colonels, have been killed in separate attacks by armed Islamic groups, the Arab-language daily Al-Hayat said today, reports AFP.