

BRIEFLY



Outgoing French President Francois Mitterrand holds a rose, the symbol of his Socialist Party, that was offered to him Tuesday at the presidential Elysee palace, where some 60 supporters gathered spontaneously to wish him well on the eve of the end of his term and the transfer of power to President-elect Jacques Chirac. — AFP/UNB photo

Rains kill 28 in India: A searing heat wave has claimed 27 lives in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan while heavy rains have killed 28 people elsewhere in the country, newspapers reported yesterday, says AFP.

Nine people fell victim Tuesday to soaring temperatures in Rajasthan, bordering Pakistan, taking the toll in the heat wave sweeping the region to 27, the Hindustan Times said.

Pope Paul turns 75: Pope John Paul II turns 75 Thursday, physically weakened after nearly 17 years as pontiff but still engaged intellectually with the great social and political issues of the day. AFP reports from Vatican City.

His gait is unsteady, the result of a broken leg and an operation last year, one of his hands shakes and he has moments of intense fatigue. But there is no evidence that he is slowing down.

40 die of cholera in Mali: An outbreak of cholera in Mali's Mopti region has killed 40 people in the past week, the state news agency Amap said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Bamako.

Dirt and lack of hygiene are at the root of this epidemic of cholera, said Larina Konate, head of the Mopti regional health service. He said measures have been taken to contain the spread of the disease.

Quake shakes Pacific islands: A major earthquake in the south Pacific Ocean was felt in the French overseas territory of New Caledonia yesterday, but officials said a feared tidal wave had failed to materialise, Reuter reports from Wellington.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre (PTWC) in Hawaii said it had cancelled a tidal wave warning issued earlier to New Caledonia, Fiji, Nauru, Western Samoa, American Samoa and the Cook Islands.

Pak minister talks to Adhikari: Visiting Pakistani minister for information and broadcasting Khalid Ahmad Khan Kharral held talks in Kathmandu on Tuesday with Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari and Deputy Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, a foreign ministry source said. AFP reports from Kathmandu.

Kharral arrived in Kathmandu Monday as a special envoy of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto armed with a letter from her to the Nepalese premier.

Lankan troops sink Tamil boat: Fighting between Tamil rebels and government troops continued Wednesday and the navy sank a rebel boat after a gun battle off the eastern coast, the military said. AP reports from Colombo.

The rebel had tried to attack a supply ship but was thwarted by naval escort boats near Trincomalee, the navy's largest base, 240 kilometers (150 miles) northeast of Colombo. The number of guerrillas killed was not known, but a rebel craft usually carries four people. There were no casualties on the two navy boats.

UNITA leader in Cape Town: Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi arrived in South Africa on Wednesday and said he hoped to learn from this country's example of national reconciliation during talks with President Nelson Mandela. AP reports from Cape Town.

Savimbi, head of the UNITA rebel movement, was greeted by Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo. The two embraced like old friends even though the governing African National Congress in South Africa was long aligned with Savimbi's rival in Angola, President Jose Eduardo dos Santos.

Pavel Grachev meets Jiang Zemin: Chinese President Jiang Zemin told Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev on Wednesday that the good relations between their two countries did not come easily and should be further developed. AP reports from Beijing.

China broke with the former Soviet Union in the late 1950s over ideological differences, and relations were not formally restored until 1989. Now the two countries have become "good neighbours, good partners and good friends," the official Xinhua News Agency quoted Jiang as saying.

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The ferry had 158 people listed on the passenger manifest, Raroca added.

Palestinians still find themselves homeless

NAQOURA (Lebanon), May 17: Israel kicked them out, Lebanon didn't let them in, Jordan won't have them back, and critics say Palestinian authorities have left them hanging, reports AP.

After years in Israeli prisons, two former Arab guerrillas find themselves stateless dependents of the U.N. peacekeeping force in South Lebanon, living in a military police lockup while the Red Cross tries to find them a home.

"I have asked to go to Jordan, to Syria, to Egypt, to Lebanon, to Algeria, to Tunisia or even Europe. I have received no answer," said Mohammed Abdel-Hamid Joulani.

On April 17, he and Khamis

Delhi plans to deploy Prithvi despite US opposition

NEW DELHI, May 17: India is considering deploying its Prithvi medium-range, surface-to-surface missile. Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao said yesterday, reports Reuter.

"The deployment of Prithvi is under consideration and I will take the house into confidence when we decide on it," Rao told the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament.

Rao did not say when the 250-km (150-mile) medium-range missile would be deployed.

India has been under pressure by Washington to drop its missile programme.

The United States, worried about the spread of missile technology, especially in South Asia where old enemies India and Pakistan are believed capable of assembling nuclear bombs, has said it does not

support India's missile programme.

The two neighbours have fought three wars, two of them over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, since their independence from Britain in 1947.

"No amount of persuasion or pressure, which it is alleged is being brought on us, will make an iota of difference on the programme as conceived by us," said Rao, who is also Defence Minister.

The Asian Age newspaper reported last month that the Indian army had set up a special group to deploy the locally produced Prithvi, and that it had been given an unspecified number of these missiles, which will be deployed along the country's western border with Pakistan.

Rao also said the surface-to-

surface Agni rocket was a technology demonstration project and would need to undergo some more trials.

"The programme as conceived will continue. There will be no let up. There will be no modification," Rao said before the house passed demands for grants of the Defence Ministry after rejecting opposition deletions or motions to cut it.

The Agni, a 14-tonne, 19-metre (60-foot) long rocket with a 2,500-km (1,500-mile) range was first tested successfully in May, 1989.

Last August, senior officials from the United States, Britain, Switzerland and Australia held a meeting with Indian officials to win New Delhi's support for curbs on the spread of missile technology.

The officials were seeking New Delhi's eventual support for the missile technology control regime, which tries to prevent the spread of technology capable of generating nuclear arms or delivery vehicles for nuclear warheads.

India has long said the voluntary club is discriminatory because it allows western nations to add to their stockpiles but prevents others from developing missiles.

India insists the Agni, named after the Hindu fire god, is not for military use but is a "re-entry demonstrator" being developed as part of an ambitious programme to launch its own satellite.

Rao also told parliament India would not accept the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in its present form as it is discriminatory.

51 executed for drug trafficking in China

BEIJING, May 17: The southern Chinese province of Guangdong has executed 51 drug traffickers in a single day as China struggles to control a growing drug problem, reports AP.

Courts on Tuesday also announced sentences for 219 other drug offenders, ranging up to a suspended death sentence, the local Yangcheng Evening News reported.

Mass sentencing rallies were held in 12 cities around the province, which borders the capitalist enclave of Hong Kong.

Twenty-six people were executed in the capital of Canton, among them a Hong Kong citizen who bought 14 kilograms (31 pounds) of a stimulant called "ice" for 16,000 yuan (dhrs 1,950) a kilogram (2.2 pounds) in the city. He resold the drug for Hong Kong dollars 18,000 (dhrs 2,340) a kilogram.

Egypt appeals India to protect Islamic holy places in Kashmir

CAIRO, May 17: Egypt appealed to India on Tuesday to protect Islamic holy places in the disputed state of Kashmir following a fire that destroyed much of the sacred city of Charar-i-Sharif and its 15th century shrine, reports AFP.

The foreign ministry called on the Indian government and Muslim separatists to find a peaceful solution to problems in the state after the shrine burnt down during clashes between troops and Muslim separatists.



Woman activists belonging to different organisations burn an effigy Tuesday of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao protesting the attack and the destruction of the 650-year-old tomb of Muslim saint Nouruddin Wali in Charar-i-Sharif in Indian-held Kashmir last week. — AFP/UNB photo

China's N-test disappointing, says Australian FM

SYDNEY, May 17: China's nuclear test this week was a "poke in the eye" for people who want to see the tests halted, Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans says, reports AP.

Speaking in a radio interview Tuesday, Evans said the test was "extremely disappointing."

It was reported on Monday that the test at the Lop Nor test site had a force of between 40 and 150 kilotonnes of TNT. Evans said that despite the developments "we are still on track for a nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty coming into force in 1996."

What both China and pos-

sibly France are saying is that they want one last series of tests in order to modernise and stabilise their armoury before that occurs, Evans said.

He added that the long-term consequences of the Chinese test "may not be too destructive but nonetheless it's yet another poke in the eye for the rest of the world that does not want to see these tests continuing."

Evans said he did not think the new French President Jacques Chirac, "actually wants to test if he can possibly avoid it."

Australia is concerned that Chirac — who takes over as French head of state

Wednesday — would agree to further nuclear tests at Mururoa in the South Pacific to complete new weapons designs.

Chirac says he has to be convinced by the boffins that he doesn't need a test, that it can be done by computer simulation.

"We are waiting to see how his judgement pans out on that, but we have made obviously very clear our feeling that it would be utterly unhelpful to the longer term disarmament cause if they did go down that path," Evans told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

HR issue likely to be included in ME talks

MONTREUX, Switzerland, May 17: Arab and Israeli negotiators were considering adding human rights concerns to their agenda for peace talks, but progress was threatened by the dispute over Israel's confiscation of Arab land in Jerusalem, reports AP.

Delegations from the Middle East and mediators from Europe, North America and Japan arrived in the Lake Geneva city of Montreux on Tuesday and began informal talks in preparation for Wednesday's start of a two-day session of multilateral peace talks.

The United States and Russia chair the "steering group" that oversees talks by working groups on five topics that grew out of peace talks set up in Madrid in 1991.

Officials said the Swiss government would propose adding a working group on human rights to the groups already considering water resources, arms control, refugees, economic develop-

ment and environment. Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin described the Swiss proposal as "very interesting" and said it would have Israel's support.

Beilin said the existing working groups have made progress.

"We are approaching a common denominator on most of the issues," Beilin told the Associated Press. "There are still some issues to refer to and, hopefully, that will be completed."

But Ahmed Tibi, an adviser to PLO leader Yasser Arafat, was less optimistic. Tibi said in a Swiss Radio interview Tuesday that the Palestinians were concerned about Israeli plans to confiscate Arab land in east Jerusalem for Jewish housing.

Tibi said it was "a very serious and dangerous step of the Israelis" as bilateral Israeli-Palestinian talks moved toward a July 1 deadline for further Israeli troop withdrawals from the occupied territories.



A Palestinian youth bares his chest in a challenge to an Israeli soldier during a demonstration in Nablus, on the West Bank on Tuesday, against the confiscation of Arab lands in Jerusalem and for the release of all Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Desperate bishop!

LONDON: Men and women cannot help their adulterous urges and religious leaders should be more forgiving when people stray, a prominent Scottish Clearlyman said on yesterday, reports Reuter.

"God has given us our promiscuous genes to I think it would be wrong for the church to condemn people who have followed their instincts," the Anglican Bishop of Edinburgh, Richard Holloway, told The Times newspaper.

"For the human race to survive we must go out and sow our seeds. God knew that when he made us, so he has given us a built-in sex drive that I believe is designed for us to go out and propagate as widely as possible."

He added: "at the end of the day the church is about promoting goodwill and kindness to all, and obviously someone who is cheating on their partner is not being very kind. But the church should not condemn affairs as sinful and wrong."

Instead, it should help people to control their instincts, Holloway said.

"Called by God"

STARKE, Florida: A former minister on death row for the 1994 slayings of an abortion doctor and his escort said Tuesday he had been "Called by God" to represent himself in his appeals, reports AP.

Paul Hill, 41, also acted as his own attorney at trial, calling no witnesses and conducting no cross-examination. He made only brief opening and closing statements focusing on his opposition to abortion.

The US Supreme Court has established that the right of self-representation extends even to death row inmates, but state Supreme Court clerk Sid White said he could not recall a precedent in Florida.

At a hearing Tuesday before Circuit Judge Elzie S. Sanders, Hill said he had been "Called by God" to represent himself and fight what he called "the slaughter of innocent human beings."

Painful denial

JERUSALEM: An immigrant woman lost both her husband and the chances of having his child when officials refused to freeze the comatose, dying man's sperm on grounds that he could not consent, reports AP.

The childless couple had immigrated to Israel from Russia in hopes of beginning test-tube fertilisation less than a day before the man was fatally injured in a car accident last weekend. Health Ministry director-general Meir Oren told Israel Television on Tuesday.

The husband was brought to the Tel Aviv area's Shiva hospital, where doctors declared him brain-dead. His wife, 30, pleaded with doctors to extract and freeze his sperm so she could have his child anyway.

Oren said Health Ministry officials agonised for hours Monday night before turning down the request.

The man died several hours later.

Teacher! kidnapper! rescuer!

NEW YORK, May 17: A New York city school teacher turned himself in on Tuesday to face kidnapping charges after running off on a cross-country trek with a 15-year-old girl, reports Reuter.

Teacher Glenn Harris, 33, claimed he was helping Christina Rosado flee an abusive home, but authorities who launched a nation wide manhunt for the pair questioned his story.

The pair disappeared on March 8 and travelled to Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, California and, finally, Las Vegas, said authorities who tracked them through bank withdrawals and other clues. Harris bank account ran dry about a month ago.

In at least two states, Harris inquired about obtaining a marriage license, authorities said. The teacher and ninth-grade student, who stayed in a string of cheap motels, also visited an amusement park and a Casino.

Harris, dubbed "Calssapova" by a local newspaper, returned to New York on Tuesday from an undisclosed location "out west," said his attorney, William Kunstler. A lawyer who helped arrange the surrender was based in Nevada he said.

The girl was safe, staying at an undisclosed location and planning to return on Wednesday, he said.

Talking to reporters before surrendering, Harris said "It's the story of a student that came to me with horrific tales of brutal family abuse. Whatever happens, I hope someone steps in to help Christina. She is a beautiful person."

Harris was to be arraigned on a charge of second-degree kidnapping, which carries a possible 25-year prison sentence. There had been no plea agreement, his attorney said.

School authorities disputed his claims.

Karens vow to continue independence struggle

THAI-MYANMAR BORDER, May 17: The leader of Myanmar's last major ethnic rebel group climbs slowly down a narrow mountain path, from his clandestine headquarters and vows "We will never surrender." Although the Karen people's struggle for an independent state is at its lowest point in decades, Gen. Bo Mya remains unbowed, reports AP.

"We are making a revolution, there is no question of surrender," said the 68-year-old general, jabbing his cane into the ground for emphasis.

The Karen people have been fighting the government in Yangon since Myanmar's independence from Britain in 1948, and Bo Mya has been part of the struggle since the start. His followers consider him both a freedom fighter and a father figure.

But to Yangon, Bo Mya is a wanted man painted in the state-controlled press as the head of a terrorist movement. Ceasefire agreements be-

tween Yangon and more than a dozen other ethnic groups have allowed the military to concentrate on the Karen.

Since then, the movements of Bo Mya have been a secret. His enemies are never far away.

"Our headquarters is in our backpack now," said Lt. Col Than Maung of the 101st Battalion, one of Bo Mya's co-terti of aging commanders.

The Karen National Union, which Bo Mya leads, also has been hurt by a split in its ranks. A breakaway Buddhist faction has aligned itself with the Burmese government and attacked camps inside Thailand that house more than 70,000 Karen refugees, KNU loyalists among them.

Some analysts suggest it is only a matter of time before the Karen will have to reach their own accommodation with the junta.

But Bo Mya says Rangoon wants the Karen to lay down their arms and submit to its rule.

Aum leader stays mum

TOKYO, May 17: In his first official interrogation by police, doomsday cult leader Shoko Asahara complained Wednesday of a liver ailment whenever he was asked about the nerve gas attack on Tokyo's subways, officers said, reports AP.

Police have said Asahara, who was arrested Tuesday, will be charged with murder and attempted murder, but Japanese law allows them to hold him for up to 22 more days before doing so.

Asahara, 40, the bearded, long-haired leader of the Aum Shinri Kyo sect, was questioned very briefly after his arrest at the cult's mountain stronghold. He insisted he was innocent and told police he was healthy.

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Ayan Khader were taken blindfolded to the Israeli controlled sector of south Lebanon and told to walk across a no-man's land to territory controlled by Lebanon's army.

"The Israeli officer said, 'This is Lebanon'. Get going and don't come back or we'll shoot you," Khader recalled.

Khader, 56, had served 25 years in Israeli jails for attacking Israeli soldiers during an infiltration from Jordan. Joulani, 27, had just completed a nine years sentence for an attempted car bombing.

They were the first people deported by Israel since the country expelled more than 400 Islamic militants to south Lebanon in December 1992. Most of those were allowed back a year later after a storm

of international protest. When the pair got to Lebanon, which has said it doesn't want to be a dumping ground for Israeli outcasts, soldiers ordered them to head back toward Israel. They were picked up by Fijian soldiers manning a U.N. checkpoint.

Khader and Joulani, both members of PLO leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction, now live in new jail — this one run by the U.N. military police in Naqoura, headquarters of the nine national peacekeeping force in south Lebanon.

Their cell doors are always open. They stroll to the beach, play soccer, watch the Fijian soldiers play rugby. But an armed Norwegian policeman follows them everywhere, and their new home looks much

like the prisons they left: bars on the windows, heavy steel doors, a single spare cot in each cell.

"We were taken by surprise. The Israelis just dumped them here," said Timur Goksel, a senior official of the 5,200-man U.N. force in Lebanon.

Both men carried Jordanian passports at the time of their arrests, but those documents are now considered travel documents that no longer confer citizenship.

Both want to go home — Khader to the PLO-ruled town of Jericho where his brother works as a blacksmith, and Joulani to Amman Jordan, where relatives own a shoe store.

Arafat spokesman Marwan Kanafani said the PLO has con-

tacted both Israel and the Red Cross seeking the men's release. "We want them back in their homeland," he said. But critics say the Palestinians have done little to get them back.

Jordanian officials said the two did not have citizenship rights and the kingdom was not responsible for them.

Israel's Foreign Ministry declined comment. An army spokesman said the men consented to go to Lebanon after Israel tried and failed to find an alternative.

"These people came from outside in order to try to commit terrorist acts and to harm people in Israel," said an official who spoke on condition of anonymity. "We have the complete right to expel

them."

On April 25, Israel's Supreme Court is scheduled to hear a petition by Khader arguing he should be released because he has finished his sentence. He already served an extra three years because no country agreed to take him.

"There is no circumstance under which it is permissible to keep a man in jail after his sentence," said his attorney, Zvi Reich.

Andreas Wigger, head of the Red Cross in Israel, said the deportations violated international guarantees that prevent the expulsion of "protected persons." He also said expulsions to Lebanon were not acceptable unless Lebanon gave its consent.

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