

BRIEFLY



President Mandela joins his grandson Mbuzo who celebrated his four years in Johannesburg with a friend at Lower Houghton Nursery School on Thursday. The 77-year-old President Mandela opted for children's play mat instead of red plastic chair during his visit on Children's Day.

— AFP/UNB photo

Lanka has highest rate of suicide:

Sri Lanka has the highest suicide rate in the world, a university professor was quoted yesterday as saying. Reuters reports from Colombo.

The rate was 56.5 per 100,000 in 1992. Tudor de Silva was quoted by the Daily News as saying, "In Lanka, the motive appears to be problems in the domain of love," he said, adding that part of the problem may be the shift from arranged marriages to marriages of choice and the resultant frustrations and stressful social settlement.

1 Palestinian killed in Gaza City:

At least one Palestinian died yesterday when Israeli troops besieged a house in Hebron where three wanted Muslim fundamentalists were holed up. Voice of Palestine Radio announced. AFP reports from Gaza City.

The station said Hamed Yaghmur was killed as the army fired seven anti-tank rockets into the building. A bulldozer was later brought in to raze the house from which three militants from the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas had exchanged fire with soldiers after dawn.

US-DPRK N-talks continue:

Despite the gulf of differences between the United States and North Korea in their nuclear dispute, some progress is being made, the head US delegate said Friday. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

His comments came a day after the longest session between the two sides since they began meeting in Kuala Lumpur May 20, and amid hopes they are a step closer to concluding the stalled talks.

Ebola death toll now 164:

The death toll from the Ebola virus stands at 164 out of 211 confirmed or suspected cases but the prospects of a further spread of the disease appear small, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said Thursday. AFP reports from Geneva.

The WHO said that for three days no new cases had been recorded in the hospital at Kikwit, the Zaire town where the outbreak first surfaced in January.

Explosion kills 6 in China:

An explosion of chemicals in a perfume factory in the northern port city of Tianjin killed six people and injured six, the Wen Hui newspaper said yesterday. Reuters reports from Beijing.

The blast late on the evening of May 22 occurred in a workshop for processing chemicals for producing musk, the newspaper said.

Toy car blast kills child in Vietnam:

A toy car fitted with explosives and a battery-powered detonator killed a child and seriously injured his father in a mysterious attack in southern Vietnam, reports said Friday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

The Chinese-made toy car was left outside the house of Duong Van Huyen, the director of a medical supplies company in Dong Nai province near Hochi Minh City, with a note apologising for missing his son's fifth birthday.

9 die by inhaling toxic gas in India:

Nine people died after inhaling toxic gas which leaked from a water treatment plant in northern India, it was reported yesterday, says AFP from Delhi.

The leak occurred overnight Thursday at the plant, located in an industrial area in the town of Pali, some 500 kilometres (312 miles) southwest of New Delhi, the Times of India and other dailies said. No further details were available.

8 coal miners burned in Vietnam:

Eight men working down an illegal coal shaft were seriously burned in an explosion of gas at the mine in Cam Pha in the northeastern coal mining area of Vietnam, a report said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

One of the eight miners injured in the explosion was in a serious condition and not expected to survive, the Vietnam News said.

Shark kills diver in HK:

A diver has been killed in a shark attack in Hong Kong, triggering fears that a giant fish that ate two swimmers in 1993 has returned to the territory's waters, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Two Kam-Sum 44, a physical education teacher, was killed in the same spot as the attacks two years ago, off the fishing village of Sai Kung on the eastern coast of the Kowloon peninsula.

6 pupils drown in the Yangtze:

Six secondary-school children from Wuhan, central China, drowned in the Yangtze River last month when their bamboo raft overturned, the Hubei Daily, received in Beijing yesterday said. AFP reports from Beijing.

The raft, which was carrying 10 pupils, tipped over whilst the children were painting pictures of the local countryside, it said.

25 more executed in China:

Twenty-five Chinese charged with various crimes, including murder and rape, were sentenced to death and executed Monday in the central city of Wuhan, the Hubei Daily, received in Beijing yesterday said. AFP reports from Beijing.

The death penalty is increasingly used in China, where authorities are battling a crime wave.

International
UK rejects idea of multinational force

Serbs agree to free all UN peacekeepers: ICRC

SARAJEVO, June 2: Bosnian Serbs have promised to free all of the nearly 380 UN peacekeepers held hostage. The international Red Cross said Friday, reports AP.

Luice Sternthal, deputy chief of the Red Cross mission in Pale, the Bosnian Serb stronghold, said "from the highest authority in Pale, we have been informed that either today or by tomorrow all UN-PROFOR personnel would be released."

UNPROFOR is the name of the UN mission in Bosnia.

Some 120 UN peacekeepers were to be bused to Yugoslavia via Zvornik, on the Bosnian border, later Friday, other sources in Pale said, on condition they not be named.

The Bosnian Serbs had demanded promises of no new NATO airstrikes in return for

the hostages, but the West had remained steadfast in its refusal to negotiate their release. Instead, Britain began dispatching the first of a threatened 6,000 new troops to Bosnia, while France and the United States positioned crack military units in the Adriatic in a show of force.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic went on local television Thursday night to warn the West not to try a rescue. But his deputy, Nikola Koljevic, was reportedly in Belgrade having talks with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

Milosevic has been having intense talks with a US envoy on resolving the hostage crisis and the overall Bosnian war.

Koljevic told the International Committee of the Red Cross Friday that the hostage

peacekeepers "might be released very soon." ICRC spokeswoman Nina Winquist said in Sarajevo.

Earlier Friday, UN officials in Sarajevo announced that Bosnian Serbs had kidnapped three more UN peacekeepers from their observation post in Gorazde, southeast of the Bosnian capital.

The three Ukrainian peacekeepers were taken sometime during the night Thursday, after having been surrounded at their post by Serbs for several days, said Lt Col Gary Coward, a UN military spokesman.

The latest detentions brought to 377 the number of UN peacekeepers held hostage or blockaded throughout Bosnia, Coward said.

Another UN spokesman, Alexander Ivanko, accused the

Serbs of continuing "to function outside the law."

"We demand the unconditional release of the hostages," Ivanko added.

A UN civilian official, a Swedish national, was released after being held briefly by Serb rebels in northern Bosnia, the Swedish Foreign Ministry said Friday.

Goran Stigmer, a 46-year-old UN Civil Affairs officer in Baja Luka, was handed over to UN authorities in neighbouring Serb-held Croatia, the ministry said. UN officials said his detention did not appear to be directly linked to the other UN hostage-taking.

AFP from London adds: Britain's Ambassador to the United Nations Sir David Hannay rejected today the idea of a new multinational peacekeeping force for Bosnia.

Benazir offers talks with MQM

ISLAMABAD, June 2: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has made conditional offer to open dialogue with Karachi's ethnic Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), calling on them to give up their arms, press reports said today, says AFP.

"My doors are open for dialogue with MQM, but my pre-conditions are that they lay down arms and surrender wanted criminals," newspapers quoted her as telling reporters late Thursday.

She was speaking following two bomb blasts and the rocketing of two police stations in Karachi earlier Thursday.

Two police were seriously hurt in the attacks, which co-

incided with a reported demand by MQM that Benazir apologise for remarks, she made last week interpreted by the party as an insult to Urdu-speaking settlers.

MQM represents Urdu-speaking Mohajirs, people who migrated from India after the division of the sub-continent in 1947. Most settled in Karachi and some other urban centres in Benazir's southern home province of Sindh.

A running feud between the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the MQM over its political demands and allegations of persecution of Mohajirs is seen a destabilising factor in the complex Karachi turmoil.

Nearly 600 people have

been killed in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, which is also the country's financial hub, this year in violence linked to ethnic, political, factional and sectarian problems.

Benazir on Thursday said she was sorry if her remarks hurt anybody's feelings, but added "I don't regret to those who have killed my police, my (paramilitary) rangers and my Mohajirs and worked against Pakistan."

Referring to reported threats to the country's leaders by the newly-surfaced Mohajir Rights Front, Benazir said "If Indira Gandhi (former Indian premier) can sacrifice her life to save her country, I can also do so for Pakistan."

Row over Lee's trip
China warns of deterioration in ties with US

BEIJING, June 2: China today warned of a serious deterioration in Sino-US relations unless Washington reverses its decision to grant a travel visa to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui, reports AFP.

"The US administration has taken one measure after another to upgrade US-Taiwan relations," Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian, was quoted by the official Xinhua news agency as saying.

"Now if he even goes so far as to allow Lee Teng-Hui to visit the United States," he added, "this has gravely infringed upon China's sovereignty."

Kashmiri women worst victim of militancy

JAMMU, June 2: Women have been the worst victims of militancy in Kashmir during last five years with atrocities against them by Pak-sponsored militants ranging from acid attacks to rapes and killings, reports PTL.

An official spokesman said that there have been scores of such incidents of atrocities on women by the gun-toting in the valley, but only some of the victims reported the offences to authorities.

The spokesman listed at least 30 cases of such atrocities which were brought to the notice of the security forces and the police during 1994.

He said there have been several cases of abduction of women and in many cases, they were killed by the militants.

World's oldest woman

JAKARTA, June 2: A 138 years old Indonesian villager, Augustina Sulasi is still living a normal life, reports Xinhua.

Local press reports quoted Otha Sosselisa, head of public relations of the Maluku local government, as saying that Sulasi's memory was still very strong and her hearing and sight were still very good.

Sulasi, a grand mother of 12 children, 58 grand children, 35 great grand children and 12 great great grand children has been tipped as the world's oldest woman.

She was born in a small village in Hatetabako, Walse, central Halmahera, in 1856. Her husband, Diflu, died after the World War II broke out in Halmahera.

Sulasi likes eating fresh banana and chew betel and drinking traditional medicine, according to her relatives.

Violence erupts in Burundian capital

NAIROBI (Kenya), June 2: Gunfire cracked for a third day Friday in Burundi's capital in a neighbourhood sealed off by the military, foreign diplomats and residents said. Three people are reported to have been killed, reports AP.

Gunfire resumed before dawn in Kamege, a predominantly Hutu neighbourhood in the northern part of the capital. Bujumbura said a Western diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity. Soldiers were preventing anyone from entering or leaving.

Armoured cars blocked some streets leading out of Kamege, said a resident who spoke by telephone on condition of anonymity. The resident reported seeing at least one armed car racing through the streets firing a machine gun at random.

Off the Record



US Postmaster General Marvin Runyon (C) and friends of Marilyn, Anna Strasberg (L) and Zsa Zsa Gabor celebrate the issue of the Monroe commemorative stamp by the US Post Office. The ceremony coincided with what would have been Monroe's 69th birthday and is the first stamp in a new series called "Legends of Hollywood".

— AFP/UNB photo

Unlucky Superman

NEW YORK: Christopher Reeve, left paralysed and unable breathe on his own after a riding accident, isn't the first Superman to meet an unhappy fate, reports AP.

The Man of Steel has been a curse of sorts for actors who

donned cape and "S" before him. George Reeves, who starred in the 1951 movie "Superman and the Mole Men" and did 104 episodes of TV's "The Adventures of Superman" from 1951 to 1957, died of a gunshot wound to the head in 1959 in what police said was a suicide.

There were reports at the time that the actor was depressed about the end of his "Superman" run.

A detective hired by Reeves' mother believed he was murdered. The mystery was never solved.

Kirk Alyn was the first live-action Superman, in movie serials from 1948 to 1950. In 1987, he bitterly complained that he had been typecast and couldn't get another movie role. Now 84, he has Alzheimer's disease and lives in Texas.

Reeve took over the fight for truth, justice and the American way in 1978 in the movie "Superman." Three sequels followed.

Superman was bad luck almost from the start: Artist Joe Shuster and writer Jerry Siegel sold their idea for the nearly invincible superhero to DC Comics in 1938. They were paid 130 dollars and lost out on millions when Superman took off.

'Emperor's new clothes'

TAIPEI: A 20-member dance troupe from Armenia is stranded in Taiwan as its local sponsor failed to make full payment following a two-and-a-half month performance tour, a press report said Friday, says AFP.

The troupe members did not rule out staging the "emperor's new clothes," meaning a naked protest, in front of the presidential office if the sponsor failed to pay up before their visas expired next week, group leader Guevorgyan Stipola told the United Daily News.

The group was invited by Chang Kuei-Yueh, secretary-general of the Taiwan Provincial Leisure Tours Association, the report said.

When their tour ended on April 26, they only got 25,000 US dollars instead of the promised 70,000 dollars, it said.

Jen Li-You, chairman of the association, said the group was invited by Chang in his personal capacity.

However, Jen said he would raise the money to help Chang pay the group "in order not to create an international dispute."

Moralists' immoral act

LOS ANGELES: Two Hasidic Jewish rabbis from New York who went to Australia to lecture on morality were charged on Thursday with sexual offences over allegedly fondling a 15-year-old girl on a plane taking them home, reports Reuters.

Rabbi Israel Grunwald, 44, was charged with abusive sexual conduct and his assistant Rabbi Yehuda Friedlander, also 44, was charged with sexual abuse a more serious charge.

The two religious leaders were arrested by Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents on Wednesday after their plane from Melbourne, Australia, landed at Los Angeles International Airport.

Grunwald, an orthodox Hasidic Jew from New York City, was released on 10,000 dollar bail. He faces up to two years in prison and a 25,000 dollar fine if convicted.

Friedlander was being held while investigators look into his 1991 guilty plea to a sexual abuse charge. He faces up to 15 years in prison and a 250,000 dollar fine if convicted.

UP govt on verge of collapse

NEW DELHI, June 2: The socialist government in India's most populous state was on the verge of collapse today after a coalition partner pulled out and sought to form a cabinet with the backing of a former foe, reports AFP.

But Mulayam Singh Yadav, chief minister of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), refused to resign and said he would prove he still enjoyed majority support in the legislature, newspapers reported.

Yadav's defiance late Thursday came after the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, Majority Society Party) pulled out of the two-party coalition which has ruled the state of some 140 million people since November 1993.

BSP president Kanshi Ram, in hospital here with heart

problems, said his party had decided to end the alliance in protest against alleged attacks on his supporters by members of Yadav's dominant Socialist Party (SP).

China may continue ICBM test launch

TOKYO, June 2: China will probably continue test launching Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) to complete development of the Dongfeng (East Wind), 31, a Japanese newspaper reported today, says AFP.

Quoting Japanese Defence Agency sources, the Sankei Shimbun said China's ICBM test took place earlier this week from a launching site near Shanxi province, in north-western China.

"Our people were being kidnapped, harassed and intimidated," he said.

He said the last straw came when an SP leader abducted a woman member of the BSP last month to prevent her from contesting local elections.

The BSP decision reduces the Uttar Pradesh government to a minority.

Yadav's Socialist Party has 131 lawmakers in the 425 strong provincial assembly while the BSP has 69.

Ram, whose party champions the cause of Hindu lower castes, has claimed the right to form a government, saying he has the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, India People's Party), the main opposition in Uttar Pradesh.

Japanese govt still divided on apology for war atrocities

TOKYO, June 2: Japan's coalition government remained divided over a proposed parliamentary resolution to apologise for Japanese war atrocities Friday, the self-imposed deadline for a decision, reports AP.

Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama had intended that the resolution be the centerpiece of Japan's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of World War II's end.

Instead, a clash over its wording has served to highlight the right-wing view, echoing wartime propaganda, that Japan fought the war to free Asia from Western colonialism.

The debate is being watched closely in Asian nations, particularly Korea and China, that suffered from Japanese brutalities in the war.

and they are likely to be angered if the resolution is watered down or discarded as a result of conservative pressure.

Talks between the ruling coalition's dominant Conservative Party, the Liberal Democrats, and Murayama's Socialists continued Friday. Hawkish legislators continued to insist that the resolution not include the word "apology."

Japanese reports indicated a compromise might be worked out. One possibility: The word "shazai" or "apology" sought by the Socialists would be altered to "hansel," a milder word whose meaning lies in between "reflection" and "remorse."

The Socialists also want the resolution to mention Japan's roundup of Asian women to serve as sex slaves for

Japanese soldiers as well as its colonisation of Korea from 1910 to 1945.

But conservatives say such language would insult the families of Japanese who died in the war.

"It's not the case that Japan unilaterally provoked the war. We shouldn't include in a parliamentary resolution the kind of thing where history's judgement may change," said Liberal Democratic legislator Tsutomu Takebe.

"European powers also had colonialist policies. Have any of them passed a resolution of remorse?" Takebe asked.

With the end of parliament's session approaching June 18, coalition legislators set Friday as a deadline for reaching agreement on the text of a resolution.

US won't mediate over Kashmir dispute

NEW DELHI, June 2: The United States will not serve as a mediator between arch rivals India and Pakistan over Kashmir, US Ambassador Frank Wisner said in remarks published today, reports AFP.

"We do not see a role for the United States as a mediator in the Kashmir dispute," Wisner told the Hindustan Times newspaper in an interview, referring to the Himalayan province claimed by both countries.

He said he had seen reports in the Indian press about a possible US role in resolving the Kashmir dispute.

"I have been crystal clear," Wisner said. "We do not see a role for the US as a mediator unless the parties concerned desired it."

India has reportedly stated that the Kashmir dispute is a bilateral issue with Pakistan

and has ruled out any third-party mediation.

Wisner said India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir should work out an agreement to solve the conflict.

In Kashmir, the situation is difficult and complex," he said. "Its linkage to India has been under dispute for years."

He said the only way "we believe the issue could be dealt with the parties to it—India, Pakistan and the people of Kashmir—should be able to negotiate and resolve the problem."

Wisner had been scheduled to leave here Friday on his first visit to Kashmir since taking up the post in New Delhi last year, but cancelled the trip at the last minute for "personal reasons," a US embassy spokesman said.

The trip would be made at a later date, he added.