

BRIEFLY



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (R) shows the way to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on Saturday before a joint press conference at the Ismailiya presidential palace in Cairo. Kohl started his six-day Middle East tour from Cairo. — AFP/UNB photo

Kohl in Amman: German Chancellor Helmut Kohl arrived in Amman yesterday on the second leg of a Middle East tour designed to support the Israeli-Arab peace process and improve German trade with the region, AFP reports from Amman.

Kohl, who was welcomed by Jordanian Prime Minister Zeid ibn Shaker on his arrival from Cairo, is due to hold talks with King Hussein late in the day on the peace process and bilateral relations.

Lankan PM hospitalised: Sri Lanka's matriarch Prime Minister, Sirima Bandaranaike, has entered a hospital in Colombo for a throat ailment, a family member said yesterday. AFP reports from Colombo.

Bandaranaike, who celebrated her 79th birthday on April 17, was taken to the Sri Jayawardeneapura Hospital on Saturday and was expected to be there for at least another four days, the sources said.

4 die in Moscow varsity fire: A fire swept through the fifth floor of a Moscow university hostel early yesterday, killing four people, Interfax news agency said, Reuter reports from Moscow.

The fire at the Patrice Lumumba University hostel in southwest Moscow broke out at 5.40 AM (0140 GMT), and was put out after just over an hour.

Boudiaf's assassin to die: A former member of slain Algerian President Mohamed Boudiaf's Presidential Guard was sentenced to death Saturday after being found guilty of Boudiaf's assassination in 1992, AFP reports from Algiers.

Second Lieutenant Lembarek Boumaaraoui was one of Boudiaf's bodyguards and was on duty the day that the president was shot in the back as he addressed a conference in Annaba in the east of the country three years ago.

Yemen recovers land from Oman: Yemen on Saturday recovered 5,000 square kilometres (2,000 square miles) of land from Oman in a ceremony ending a 20-year dispute that had erupted into armed clashes, the Omani news agency ONA reported, AFP says from Muscat.

The decision of the two countries to settle their border differences was judicious and courageous, Msalem Ibn Ali al-Bussaidi, Governor of the Omani province of Dhofar, said.

271 children murdered in Brazil: Brazilian Institute of Legal Medicine (IML) said that 271 children and teenagers were murdered during the first quarter of this year in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Xinhua reports from Brasilia.

The institute also indicated in a report that another 98 cases of violence against children and teenagers, including maltreatment, were also recorded in Brasilia in this period.

UN soldier dies in Zagreb mishap: A French UN peacekeeper was killed and another injured when their lorry crashed head-on with a car Saturday in Croatia, an Interior Ministry spokesman in Zagreb told AFP.

The accident, in which two other people were also killed, was blamed on the lorry's "inappropriate" speed. The truck hurtled into a bend and then collided with another car travelling in the opposite direction, a spokesman said.

11 die in Thai road mishap: Eleven people were killed in a road accident in central Thailand Saturday, according to local newspaper the Nation yesterday, Xinhua reports from Bangkok.

Danish team cancels Moscow trip: Denmark has cancelled a scheduled visit to Russia by a delegation of officers and military instructors in protest against Moscow's military action in Chechnya, a Danish newspaper reported on Saturday, Reuter reports from Copenhagen.

The Jyllands-Posten national daily said a visit to military installations in the St Petersburg area, part of a 10-day trip to countries in the Baltic region starting on Monday, had been called off by the Danish Defence Ministry.

SLA militiaman kills 4 comrades: A Lebanese militiaman fatally shot four comrades and wounded himself and another man in Israel's self-declared security zone in Southern Lebanon on Saturday, the South Lebanon Army (SLA) said, AFP reports from Marjayoun, Lebanon.

SDP renews threat to quit Japan's ruling coalition

TOKYO, June 4: Japan's Socialists renewed a threat today to quit the ruling coalition because their conservative partners were trying to dilute a proposed apology in parliament for the country's World War II atrocities, reports AFP.

"We want to avoid an unfortunate turn of events, but we worry that the worst could happen," Chiuro Morii, a Whip for the Social Democratic Party, said in a television panel discussion.

His comment underlined the touted "determination" of Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, the Socialist head, to revolt if the coalition failed to work out a resolution addressing Japan's "acts of aggression" and "colonial rule."

Peace move brings uncertainty to Golan dwellers

EL ROM, Golan Heights, June 4: At a scenic overlook on the Golan Heights, Israelis in jeans and Druse Arabs in knitted white prayer caps take turns dropping shekels into a coin-operated telescope to gaze at the hazy mountains of Syria in the distance, reports AP.

For the Druse, the view is of a land they have not set foot in for 28 years. For the Israelis, it is of a powerful foe they have faced on the battlefield three times in the past half-century.

Israelis have prized the Golan Heights as a guard tower that has defended them against Syria's armed might for nearly three decades. Rusted tanks and fenced-off fields of unexploded mines punctuate the roads in mute testimony to their battles.

Dissidents mark pro-democracy movement day Security beefed up around Tiananmen Square

BEIJING, June 4: A dissident the Chinese government accused of masterminding pro-democracy demonstrations in 1989 planned a hunger strike Sunday to mark the sixth anniversary of the military assault on unarmed protesters, reports AP.

Security has been tightened in the capital's university district, where the 1989 protests took root. Foreign journalists have been prohibited from openly reporting on campuses and the owners of popular off-campus restaurants have been told to the shut down around the anniversary.

The official Xinhua News Agency and other media reported Sunday that students at Beijing University and other schools were busy over the weekend attending movies, dances and lectures. The timing was likely intended to convey a sense of calm normalcy.

Tiananmen Square, focal point of the mass demonstrations, was crowded, as it is most weekends, with tourists taking pictures and others strolling or flying kites.

In a letter received Saturday and released Sunday by the New York-based group Human Rights in China, Chen said he would stage a 24-hour fast beginning just after midnight.

He called for the release of political prisoners taken into custody in 1989 and this year and a halt to the surveillance and harassment of their families.

Chen's act and its timing have symbolic resonance. Some students in the 1989 protests staged hunger strikes in Tiananmen Square to try to persuade the government to listen to their demands for political reforms.

In the early hours of June 4, 1989, Chinese troops and tanks fought their way into central Beijing, slaughtering hundreds of unarmed protesters. Thousands arrested in the following weeks and months remain in prison, some for political crimes, others on trumped-up criminal charges.

Chen was convicted of being a "black hand" behind the demonstrations. He served part of a 13-year sentence before being released last year on medical parole and has been diagnosed with cancer. Last month, police warned Chen he would be sent back to prison if he signed any petitions or open letters and told him not to leave his home.

Chinese authorities have defended this year's demonstrations, saying all steps taken are within the law. The leadership

also maintains that a hard line on dissent is necessary for husbanding the economic boom that benefits most citizens.

Human rights groups say China's suppression of dissidents, Christians and Tibetans has strengthened, in part because President Clinton last year removed improved human rights as a condition for granting China most-favored-nation trading status.

AFP adds, Tiananmen Square, where the Chinese military massacred pro-democracy activists six years ago, was wrapped in a heavy security blanket Sunday.

After a night of relative calm, more than 50 police vehicles, including unmarked cars, took up positions under the shade of trees lining the square.

India punishes 39 for excesses in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, June 4: Indian authorities have punished 39 army personnel, including 15 officers, for committing excesses against civilians in Kashmir, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today, says AFP.

The action ranges from dismissal from service, rigorous imprisonment for up to 12 years and extra duty for crimes committed between 1990 and 1994, the news agency quoted the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) as saying.

The guilty soldiers were charged with rape, assault, theft, and causing death and injury in custody.

PTI said four soldiers were sacked from the army and simultaneously sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for 10 years for raping a Kashmiri woman in May 1993.

Akashi urges to be cautious about handling RRF

ZAGREB, June 4: UN Special Envoy to former Yugoslavia Yasushi Akashi urged Western leaders today to be "very careful" over the command and control structure of a new Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) for Bosnia, reports AFP.

He said if the multinational force agreed Saturday in Paris by 15 NATO and European Union defence ministers, "July reflects the needs and the requirements of UNPROFOR (UN Protection Force), certainly it's a good thing."

However, he told AFP, "we have to be very careful about the details of the command and the control... if we are not the confusion can arise like it did in Somalia."

The Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) which would comprise up to 10,000 troops, will be tasked with regrouping UN peacekeepers from the most exposed parts of Bosnia.

Police said businessmen were slowly coming back to the town of Galle, 72 miles (112 kilometres) south of here, and more people were seen on the roads as ethnic tensions subsided after Friday's arson attacks.

"We are maintaining a very high level of security. Army and navy troops are making check posts and continued mobile patrols. Things are slowly returning to normal," a police officer in Galle said by telephone.

Lanka begins processing to extradite Prabhakaran

COLOMBO, June 4: Sri Lanka has begun processing an Indian request to extradite a Tamil guerrilla chief and two aides for the assassination of former Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi, the Foreign Ministry said today, reports AFP.

The ministry said India's request for the arrest and extradition of Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and his intelligence chief Pottu Amman and women's wing leader Lakila.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now taking steps to

have the request processed by the concerned authorities," the ministry said in a statement today.

It said the Attorney-General will examine the request and President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is also defence minister, will give the final go ahead to commence extradition proceedings.

Earlier, Colombo played down the extradition issue as it conducted peace talks with the LTTE but after the negotiations collapsed on April 19, Kumaratunga described the Tiger supremo as a megalomaniac.

India's Minister of State for Commerce Palanippan Chidambaram, a friend of the Gandhi family, said Saturday the request was conveyed to Colombo through a special messenger.

It is the first time India has sought the arrest of the elusive 49-year-old Prabhakaran, whose separatist movement is fighting for an independent homeland in northeast Sri Lanka.

Chidambaram said the government decided to aim for the extradition of Prabhakaran.



Defence ministers (L to R) American William Perry, French Charles Millon, German Volker Rube, British Malcolm Rifkind, pose for photographers on Saturday at the Kiebor Conference Centre in Paris, after the EU-NATO ministers meeting on Bosnia. The ministers decided to reinforce the UNPROFOR with about 10,000 soldiers before the end of the month. —AFP/UNB photo

Chechen HQ Vedeno falls to Russian forces

MOSCOW, June 4: Russian forces in Chechnya said they had taken complete control this morning of Vedeno, the headquarters of Chechen separatists, ITAR-Tass news agency reported, says AFP.

Vedeno, around 50 kilometres (30 miles) southeast of the Chechen capital Grozny, was taken "after a night of fierce fighting," Major Alexander Kuts, spokesman for the Russian command in Grozny said.

Vedeno, in the Caucasian Mountains, was one of the strongholds the separatists fell back on after being forced out of lower ground by the Russians.

No casualty tolls were available from either side. Kuts

said.

A Defence Ministry spokesman in Moscow, questioned by AFP, said he could not immediately confirm the fall of Vedeno.

The Russian military command in Chechnya had already announced Saturday that its men had "hoisted the Russian flag" over Vedeno, one of the last bastions of Chechen separatists.

Reuter adds: Chechen military spokesman today dismissed as "absurd" a Russian claim that its forces had taken the southeastern rebel base of Vedeno, thousands of feet (metres) high up in a wooded river gorge. Interfax agency said.

Int'l response to N-accident tested in Russia

GENEVA, June 4: New international response procedures to a nuclear accident have successfully been tested in northern Russia, the United Nations said here Saturday, reports AFP.

The stimulation of a major accident, carried out at a nuclear facility in the Kola Peninsula, south of Murmansk earlier this week, tested various procedures for responding to a catastrophe such as the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in 1986.

The test involved the Russian government as well as members of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), based in Vienna and Geneva.

Students hurl firebomb at police ROK crackdown on union activities protested

SEOUL, June 4: Hundreds of South Korean students hurled firebombs at riot police today as they were blocked from marching to central Seoul from a college campus, witnesses said, reports Reuter.

"Let's put an end to the Kim Young-Sam regime," students chanted during a rally of about 1,500 students.

The two-hour rally inside Yonsei University, about five hundred students made their way outside the campus gates as riot police used tear gas to disperse the protesters.

Students wielded steel pipes and fought running battles with riot police, who were deployed around the campus. Police fought back with tear gas.

Many students were led away by riot police, said a Reuter photographer. He said other people tried to stop students being dragged away, and to prevent police buses from driving away with the students.

There were no reports of serious injuries.

The students had gathered

to protest against a government's crackdown on labour union activities and plans to raid two religious premises to arrest union leaders of Korea Telecom (KT).

"The dispute should be solved peacefully. Release unionists arrested," Students demanded during the rally.

KT workers are protesting over a government plan to privatise KT and open the local telecommunications market. They say privatisation would give giant conglomerates a monopoly of the industry.

Six KT union leaders are currently on hunger strike in Seoul's catholic cathedral and another seven are holed up at a Buddhist temple in the capital.

South Korean police have several times called on church and temple authorities to hand over the unionists, but to no avail.

With the government insisting it would not tolerate illegal union activities, police raids on both cathedral and temple appeared imminent.

Off the Record

Granny to welcome the baby boy

MANILA: The youngest daughter of former President Corason Aquino, who stunned the nation last year by announcing she was pregnant by a married man twice her age, had a baby boy Sunday, hospital staff said, reports AP.

A nurse at Saint Luke's Hospital said Kris Aquino, 23, had an 8.5-pound (3.9-kilogram) boy by Caesarean section. The child was in good condition but the mother was in the "high-risk" unit because of an eye ailment.

The pregnancy had driven a wedge between the former president, a devout Roman Catholic, and her daughter because the father, actor Philip Salvador, is married.

Mrs. Aquino said she would forgive her daughter and welcome her grandchild but that she would never accept Salvador. Mrs. Aquino was in the United States on Sunday.

Salvador has been seeking an annulment from his wife, who lives in Queens, New York. Last week, a judge in Quezon City delayed a decision on the petition for 60 days to allow the wife time to respond to her husband's request to dissolve their marriage.

There is no divorce in the Philippines although annulments are sometimes granted.

Duchess on show business

LONDON: The Duchess of York, estranged wife of Britain's Prince Andrew, has had talks with film-makers 20th Century Fox about making a movie on the young Queen Victoria, a spokeswoman for the former Sarah Ferguson said, reports AFP.

"The Duchess has had discussions, but there is no deal on the table and no specific role has been agreed," the spokeswoman said.

The Sunday Times said that the idea was a co-production based on one of the Duchess's books, giving her a preponderant role in the shooting of the film, which has a budget of 30 million dollars and is planned to start early next year.

She would have a commission and a share of the profits, the paper said.

In an interview last week with Hello, magazine, the Duchess indicated that she had problems making ends meet.

"I have to earn my living, for me and for my children," she said.

"I have decided to concentrate on my commercial activities and cut back momentarily my trips for charity."

A series of children's books by the Duchess has been turned into television cartoons, but the Sunday Times said a follow-up, involving fruits, flowers and vegetables as "characters" had run into trouble amid allegations of plagiarism.

Poor pandas!

BEIJING: Workers at nature reserves in central Sichuan province have saved the lives of nine of China's endangered wild pandas on the verge of starvation, Xinhua news agency reported, says Reuter.

Five of the pandas have been returned to the wild while three were kept at local rescue and research centres because they were still weak and needed medical aid, it said.

One baby panda was being kept at a local forestry centre and workers said they would let it return to the wild when it was old enough to survive alone, Xinhua said.

The nine pandas were found on the brink of death between October last year and the end of May in seven countries in Sichuan, main habitat of the rare animal, it said.

Researchers cited two reasons for the new cases of starvation among China's tiny surviving population of an estimated 1,000 pandas in the wild.

New style to discipline toddler

SAGINAW, MICHIGAN: The father of a toddler has been charged with child abuse after he put his 22-month-old daughter in a microwave oven, police said Saturday, reports AFP.

The man, Gerald Salais, 22, put his daughter in a microwave last week to discipline her, the police said. He turned on the power but it was unclear whether he had pressed the "cook" button.

The child was bruised but otherwise not injured. She was taken to hospital and later released to her grandmother's custody.

Salais remained in police custody Saturday and was to be arraigned Monday for first-degree child abuse and exposing a child with intent to injure — both are felonies.

Dalai Lama renews call for Tibetan federation

TOKYO, June 4: Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, renewed a proposal for the creation of a federation between China and an autonomous Tibetan government, in an interview published today, reports AFP.

The Dalai Lama said he still supported the idea of a plebiscite on the proposed federation and that he would follow the "will of the Tibetan people." He told the Nihon Keizai business daily.

The idea was first launched seven years ago but was snubbed by the Beijing government. He revived the proposal in an interview with the newspaper at his exiled base at Dharamsala in northern India.