



Police officers in All Nippon Airways (ANA) uniforms take the bloodstained hijacker Fumio Kutsumi, 53, after his arrest on Thursday. A team of more than 20 riot police stormed the hijacked jet at Hakodate airport, rescuing all 365 hostages aboard and arresting the hijacker some 15 hours after the drama began. — AFP/UNB photo

Portable phones play key role to end hijack drama

TOKYO, June 22: Portable phones played a key role in helping police arrest the 53-year-old Japanese bank employee who hijacked a domestic airliner on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

A top government official praised the use of portable phones by some of the 350 passengers on board the hijacked all Nippon Airways jumbo jet as it sat on the runway in Hakodate, north-western Japan.

"It was very helpful that some of the passengers reported the movements of the hijacker to people outside with their portable phones," Chief Cabinet Secretary Kozo Igarashi told a news conference on Thursday.

A 44-year-old company employee borrowed a portable phone from his company colleague to secretly call police from the toilet to report the movements of the hijacker several times.

Another passenger called his mother in her country home to set her at ease during the passengers' 16-hour ordeal, which ended when police stormed the plane and arrested the hijacker before dawn on Thursday.

Intelligence from the passengers was particularly important to authorities because the hijacker refused to negotiate directly with officials, relaying his demands through the captain and cabin attendants.

The number of portable phones owned by Japanese doubled last year to 4.3 million.

In January, portable phones were also in great demand in Kobe and nearby areas in central Japan because conventional telephone lines were severely damaged by a killer earthquake which killed over 5,500 people.

BRIEFLY

Peres in Amman: Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres flew to Amman yesterday for talks with Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan, Peres' spokesman said, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

The spokesman said Prince Hassan had invited Peres for talks that were part of "periodical meetings to discuss issues on the agenda." He gave no details.

Evans for actions against France: Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans said yesterday he would recommend further retaliatory action against France over its plan to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific, AFP reports from Canberra.

Evans was to address a special cabinet meeting later, after returning empty-handed from Paris where he had led a delegation of South Pacific leaders to protest the test programme.

KSA sends aid for Bosnians: Saudia Arabia sent more than 3,500 tonnes of emergency aid, including 2,500 tonnes of flour, to Bosnian Muslims by ship Wednesday, Saudi official radio said, AFP reports from Riyadh.

The ship left the Red Sea port of Jeddah bound for Croatia, where the aid would be distributed to Bosnian refugees and Muslims living in Bosnia, the radio said.

Jihad leader shot dead in Gaza: Masked gunmen shot dead Thursday a leader of the hardline Islamic jihad at the Shatti Shatti Refugee Camp in Gaza City, the movement said, AFP reports from Gaza City, Gaza Strip.

Mahmud el-Khawaja, 34, was sprayed with 10 bullets from a gun fitted with a silencer as the gunmen drove past in a car, they added.

Mild quake rocks Orissa: Slight tremors shook parts of the eastern Indian state of Orissa yesterday but there were no reports of any casualties of damage, the Press Trust of India said, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The mild earthquake, measuring 4.8 on the Richter scale, had its epicentre in the district of Keonjhar, the news agency said.

3 die as planes collide in US: Two planes helping to fight a wildfire collided Wednesday and crashed into a house, killing three people and demolishing two homes, AP reports from Ramona.

A twin-engine plane owned by the US Forest Service appeared to clip the tail of a four-engine air tanker the agency was using on contract, witnesses said.

Huge bombs seized in Manila: Police have uncovered a huge cache of bombs at an abandoned junkyard in this city south of Manila, an investigator said yesterday, AFP reports from Batangas, Philippines.

A total of 111 rounds of 105mm rocket warheads, of the same type used by Philippine Air Force ground attack planes, and 30 canisters of inert gas, hidden inside six wooden boxes, were recovered from the yard, police officer Mario Doctolero, an ordnance expert, said.

Arms dealer killed in Rio: A suspected arms dealer believed to have been involved in sales between the United States and Iraq was assassinated in his luxury Rio apartment, local Globo Television said on Wednesday, Reuter reports from Rio-de Janeiro.

3 die in Sao Paulo prison riot: Two prisoners and a Brazilian prison official were killed eight other people were injured on Wednesday when police raided a penitentiary to end a prison riot, Globo Television said, Reuter reports from Sao Paulo.

The riot began on Tuesday morning in the Hortolandia penitentiary, 60 miles (100 km) northwest of Sao Paulo, with prisoners taking 23 employees hostage, according to local press reports.

Rao likely to include 10 new ministers

NEW DELHI, June 22: Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao is likely to induct 10 more ministers into his cabinet in a week's time to reward those younger people in the Congress Party who have been loyal to Rao during the recent crisis in the party, it was learnt here yesterday, reports Xinhua.

The forthcoming expansion of Rao's cabinet will be the third this year and may be the last before the general elections due early next year. Rao expanded his cabinet in February and early this month for the same purpose.

The expansion exercise is likely to be coupled with the restructuring of All India Congress Committee (AICC) executive in a bid to strengthen the Congress Party organizational work for the next general elections. Rao has already indicated that he wanted to draft three to four senior ministers for party work. He might appoint two more general secretaries of the Congress Party.

11 more shot dead in Karachi

KARACHI, June 22: Eleven people were shot dead as gunmen from rival factions of a political party attacked each other, paralyzing an entire industrial district here overnight, officials said today, reports AFP.

The victims included a 12-year-old girl who was killed late Wednesday by a stray bullet while inside her home in eastern Korangi district, the officials said.

Two brothers, in their 20s, were also killed in a crossfire as militants from rival factions of the ethnic Mahajir Quami Movement (MQM) battled each other elsewhere in the city.

Police entering the industrial district late Wednesday came under rocket and small arms fire and at least one of them was killed after being abducted by the gunman.

The intense gun battle forced police officers out of the area for several hours, residents said.

71 to die in Algeria

ALGIERS, June 22: The Criminal Court at Laghouat in southern Algeria sentenced 71 people to death, 70 of them in their absence, during its last sitting, the town's prosecutor's office announced today, reports AFP.

The office stated that 14 cases of "terrorism and state security offences" — the term used by authorities for the actions of armed Islamic extremists — were among the 16 criminal cases considered in the past two weeks.

The statement, reported by the APS official news agency, did not say whether all those convicted were found guilty on "terrorist" charges.

At least 30,000 people have been killed, according to US state department estimates, since Muslim fundamentalists began a civil war after the army-backed regime called off the second round of general elections the now outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win in January 1992.

11 of wedding party electrocuted in UP

NEW DELHI, June 22: A bus carrying members of a wedding party hit a live electric wire near a central India village, killing 11 of the occupants, a state official said Thursday, reports AP.

Ten others suffered burn injuries in the accident that occurred near Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh state on Tuesday, said H C Gupta, quoting a delayed report.

The bus was carrying 70 people and it hit an electric pole when the driver lost balance causing the wires to fall on the bus.

Talks on fate of Nagorno-Karabakh yield no results

HELSINKI, June 22: Closed session talks on the future of Nagorno-Karabakh, the war-torn Armenian-majority enclave in Azerbaijan, ended here Wednesday without apparent progress, a Finnish government statement said, reports AFP.

However, the encouraging atmosphere gives reason to believe that the negotiation process may have become irreversible, "was the upbeat assessment of the Finns, who brokered the talks along with Minsk Group co-President Russia.

Azerbaijanis, Armenians and independent Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh met in closed session for four days of negotiations from last Thursday.

Yeltsin calls for political solution to Chechen war

MOSCOW, June 22: Russian President Boris Yeltsin called today for a political solution to the war in Chechnya and accused his security forces of opting for force instead of negotiations, reports AFP.

"The process of political solution to the Chechen crisis has been too slow. We have lacked flexibility and political will," said Yeltsin, addressing a nationally televised session of his full government.

Yeltsin savaged the security forces' handling of the Budennovsk crisis in which a group of Chechen guerrillas took some 1,500 people hostage and demanded an end to the war in Chechnya.

About 150 people were killed in the six-day drama, many of them during two failed Russian attempts to free the hostages by force. The crisis was only defused after Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin began negotiating

with the Chechens.

Yeltsin said the Budennovsk crisis "became possible after errors in the functioning of the structures of government and the presidency, of ministers, and of departments."

The speech was not only an indictment of the Security Ministries heavy-handed response to the hostage crisis, but of the disastrous war in Chechnya, where 15,000 to 30,000 people have died since Yeltsin ordered the independence uprising to be crushed last December.

"The people whose job it is to hold negotiations have instead advocated force. The FSB (secret services), the Interior Ministry, have not provided information" on the Chechens' plans, Yeltsin said.

A decision on the future of the relevant ministers will be taken at a meeting of Yeltsin's inner circle, the Security Council, next week, he said.

"There will be decisions on certain leaders of ministries and departments" responsible for the Budennovsk hostage crisis, he said.

After the speech, Yeltsin met with other top officials to discuss ending the Chechen crisis and personnel questions, Interfax News Agency said. Pointedly, the so-called "power ministers," such as defence and interior, were not present.

Yeltsin's fierce criticism came a day after the lower house of parliament, the State Duma, voted no-confidence in the government for its handling of the Budennovsk crisis. Yeltsin can ignore the first vote, but if an identical motion is passed within three months, he must either dismiss his cabinet or dissolve parliament.

Yeltsin said after the vote that he had full confidence in his cabinet.



Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (C, right) and Saudi Prince Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud (front L), one of the guardians of the holy mosques of Makkah and Medina, cut the ribbon during the inauguration ceremony of Rome's first mosque Wednesday. The new mosque in the residential district of Parioli, north of the Vatican, is one of the biggest of Europe and was opened for worshippers on the day. — AFP/UNB photo

Lanka tightens security for Muslims living in east

COLOMBO, June 22: The Sri Lankan military has tightened security for Muslims living in the country's east after some were threatened by Tamil separatist rebels, an army spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

"The security forces and the police have strengthened security for Muslims in the east," Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe told reporters, adding that additional civilian guards had been sent to eastern villages.

He said some Muslims had fled Kattankudy in the Batticaloa district after the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

sent letters to families there telling them to leave town by July 1.

"This has caused some disturbances, but there are 5,000 Tamils in Kattankudy who are dependent on the Muslims for their employment and they are pleading with the Muslims not to leave," Munasinghe said.

He predicted people would eventually return home.

S M Mohamed Ismail, president of the Kattankudy Citizen's Peace Committee, told Reuters on Wednesday that at least 1,000 wealthy people had already left the town after the threats.

The Tigers fighting for a separate state in the north and east for the minority Tamil community, have denied they wrote the letters.

But Munasinghe, referring to the Tamil rebels, said: "In our minds, there is no one else who would pressure the Muslims to leave. Who else would do it?"

The letters, written on paper bearing the Tigers' letterhead and received on June 9, said the Muslims were an "obstacle" to the Tigers' goal of a separate state. Sri Lanka's eastern region is a mix of Tamils, Muslims and majority Sinhalese.

Washington regrets as ICRC closes Yangon office next month

WASHINGTON, June 22: The White House voiced regret Wednesday that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would close its Yangon office next month after failing to gain access to the country's political detainees, reports AFP.

"We deeply regret the refusal of the regime in Yangon to reach an acceptable arrangement on access" for the ICRC, White House spokesman Michael McCurry said in a statement.

"ICRC humanitarian activities, including prison visits, play a critically important

role in protecting individuals throughout the world," McCurry said.

In a press statement released Monday by its regional office in Bangkok, the ICRC said it would resume talks if the junta, officially known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), sought a "constructive" dialogue.

The decision to close the office in July followed "several years of discussions" with Yangon, the statement indicated.

A SLORC reply on March 21 to the latest ICRC ap-

proach "was not satisfactory, as it took no account of the customary procedures for visits to places of detention," it noted. "Since that time, the ICRC has tried to persuade the SLORC to reconsider its position, but in vain."

"The regime's apparent intransigence on this and other issues contrasts starkly with commitments made to us and other officials last year," McCurry said.

"It is a further demonstration that the regime is choosing the path of isolation."

Serbs in no mood to compromise

PALE, Bosnia, June 22: Bosnian Serbs, while keen to break out of their isolation, are in no mood to compromise with international negotiators renewing the quest for peace in Bosnia, political sources said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Expecting a first visit from European Union Envoy Carl Bildt this week, they will greet him with two familiar demands which world powers have consistently refused.

These are international recognition for their self-styled Bosnian Serb republic and the withdrawal of a big power plan that would strip them of territory gained in the war.

"The ball is in their court," said an official who declined to be named. "We are waiting to see what initiatives will come from the international community."

Bildt, making an exploratory visit to former Yugoslavia, did not plan to include the Bosnian Serb stronghold of Pale.

But local sources said they would be angry to be left out, and diplomats in Belgrade did not rule out a Bildt Mission to Pale to meet "president" Radovan Karadzic and other Bosnian Serb leaders.

Although he is officially the EU representative to the peace process, diplomats said he was informally speaking for the contact group — comprising the United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany — that is spearheading mediation efforts.

Attempts to revive peace talks have intensified since the Serbs released almost 400 UN hostages they seized last month in retaliation for NATO air strikes.

UN Secretary General

Boutros Boutros-Ghali urged a new peace conference which Karadzic could attend, possibly without accepting the big power plan to divide the country in half between Serbs and a Muslim-Croat federation.

Meanwhile, the United Nations refused to let NATO bomb a Bosnian Serb airfield after two Serb jets violated the no-fly zone in northern Bosnia and hours later a shell killed five people in a Sarajevo suburb on Wednesday.

Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic accused the UN mission of shirking its duty by blocking the air strikes.

The European Union's new mediator Carl Bildt, on his first mission to ex-Yugoslavia, expressed caution over hopes for peace but predicted UN troops would not pull out of Bosnia.

Off the Record

All they did to visit Monisha

NEW DELHI: A star-struck teenager stole more than 5,000 dollars from his parents and set off with a friend to visit a top Indian film actress in Bombay, newspapers said yesterday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Nitin Kumar, 15, and a friend Shatrughan Verma, were picked up by police in New Delhi on Wednesday with the 175,000 rupees (5,468 dollars) stolen from Kumar's parents to finance their trip to India's movie capital, police said.

Kumar, an admirer of willowy Nepalese-born actress Monisha Koirala, who won accolades for her role in "Bombay," a controversial film about a Hindu-Muslim love affair, said his longing for Koirala had spurred him on.

"It was for Monisha Koirala," he said. "Ever since I saw '1942: A Love Story' and 'Bombay,' I have been wanting to meet her."

Police said the pair had been sent back to their homes in Aligarh, more than 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) from Bombay.

Correlation between violence and lyrics

CHICAGO: Concerned about the harmful effects of song lyrics that denigrate women and promote violence, the American Medical Association has called for mandatory ratings for recorded music, reports AP.

Delegates at the AMA's annual policy-making meeting approved a resolution Wednesday directing the AMA "to offer to work with the music recording industry to develop a mandatory rating system," perhaps modeled after movie ratings.

The AMA based its action on the premise that violent lyrics are inciting children to violence, which adds more than 5.3 billion dollars each year to the nation's health-care expenditures.

"Evidence is mounting of a correlation between aggression and listening to violent lyrics," the resolution said. "Repeated listening may desensitize children to violence without conveying to them the consequences of violent behaviour."

The music industry has established a voluntary rating system in which some cassettes and compact discs are labelled with warning stickers. But Susan Rudd Wynn, an allergist in Fort Worth, Texas, and a backer of the resolution said that doesn't go far enough.

Costly but worthy

LONDON: A German woman paid 375,000 pounds (560,000 dollars) at Sotheby's in London Tuesday for a Stradivari violin for her 10-year-old music student daughter, reports AFP.

Elisabeth Thomas, 34, paid substantially more than the 200,000 pound (300,000 dollars) pre-sale estimate for the instrument, but she believed it was worth the money, The Daily Telegraph reported Wednesday.

"The first time we saw the violin we fell in love with it. It has a very good sound," she told the paper.

Thomas and her husband Hans-Josef, 42, are violin dealers and makers based in Aachen Germany. They decided to buy the violin because it was slightly undersized and ideal for their daughter Christina, who is preparing to take master classes later this year.

The violin was made by Antonio Stradivari in 1667 and was sold by the widow of a former BBC orchestra leader, Tom Jenkins, who bought it in 1948 for 1,250 pounds (1,900 dollars).

China for concrete US actions to repair ties

BEIJING, June 22: China rejected today overtures by Washington to hold high-level talks to patch up ties damaged by Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's US visit, saying the incident could not be written off with "lip-service," reports AFP.

Confirming that the US State Department had contacted Beijing to request a high-level exchange of visits, Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian said it was up to the United States to take concrete action to "remove the pernicious effect" of Lee's "private" visit earlier this month.

"Under such circumstances, it just won't work for the US side to try to write this off by paying lip-service and making hollow gestures," Chen told journalists.

The official declined to spell out precisely what actions would be needed from the United States to put badly damaged ties back on track, saying that the demands had been spelled out in meetings between Chinese and foreign leaders and that "the US side is also very clear."

When asked whether China was considering further retaliation in the commercial field, Chen said that, while it was his country's policy not to enter into confrontation with any other nation, "this case, if not settled, will surely exert some serious impact on Sino-US relations."

Iran begins repatriating Afghan refugees

NICOSIA, June 22: Iran began repatriating 400,000 Afghans Thursday who have sought refuge in the country from the Afghan civil war, reports Reuter.

The Iranian News Agency IRNA quoted Interior Ministry Director-General for Refugee Affairs Ahmad Hussein as saying they were returning to their homeland of their own free will.

IRNA said the agreement to start repatriation was made by a trilateral commission of representatives from Iran, Afghanistan and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Hussein said late on Wednesday that some of the Afghans had been repatriated held temporary residence cards and that the groundwork had been prepared for a further 500,000 Afghans with long-term residence cards to go home.

He said it was costing Iran 2 million dollars a day to provide for the refugees.



An elderly Chechen woman, the mother of one of Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev's soldiers, rushes forward to hug Basayev on Tuesday in Khasavyurt, some 20 km east of the Chechen border in the Russia's republic of Dagestan. — AFP/UNB photo