

BRIEFLY

2 key Spanish ministers resign: Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez Wednesday accepted the resignation of his deputy premier and the defence minister over a phone-tapping scandal, the government said, AFP reports from Madrid.

Deputy Prime Minister Narcis Serra, a long-time colleague of Gonzalez, and Defence Minister Julian Garcia Vargas had tendered their resignation when the scandal broke two weeks ago over revelations that the secret service tapped the phones of several senior political figures, including King Juan Carlos.

Thousands hit by Virginia floods:

Flooding rivers and creeks chased thousands of people from their homes Wednesday as rain soaked Virginia for a sixth day, AP reports from Buena Vista, Virginia.

In the Blue Ridge Mountains, where 6.6 (16.7 cms) inches of rain fell in Buena Vista in the 24 hours ending at 5 pm, Michael Fowler was packing his pickup with the family's possessions when the spreading Maury River caught him.

Deng's statue in Tiananmen Square:

A larger-than-life bronze statue of Deng Xiaoping, China's paramount leader and "chief architect" of its economic explosion, is being installed in a Tiananmen Square Museum, officials said yesterday, Reuters reports from Beijing.

The statue portrays the diminutive leader in 1992 during his barnstorming tour of south China, a journey that rejuvenated his flagging economic reforms after three years of heavy-handed, anti-inflation austerity.

Chechen talks may move to Moscow:

Peace talks between Chechen and Russian officials trying to end the six-month war in Chechnya could move to Moscow to include Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, a top mediator said Thursday, AP reports from Grozny.

Chernomyrdin's direct involvement would signal major commitment by the Russian leadership toward resolving the conflict in the breakaway southern republic. Chernomyrdin played a key role in ending the recent hostage crisis in the southern city of Budynovsk.

Mexican minister resigns:

The most powerful member of President Ernesto Zedillo's Cabinet resigned Wednesday, but authorities who announced the second major shakeup in the fledgling government gave no reason, AP reports from Mexico City.

Presidential spokesman Carlos Salomon said on national television that Zedillo had accepted the resignation of Esteban Moctezuma Barragan as secretary of the Interior Ministry.

UN soldier killed in Sarajevo:

A French peacekeeper died and two others were slightly injured when his armoured car ran over an anti-tank mine in Sarajevo early yesterday morning, a UN spokesman said, AFP reports from Sarajevo.

Major General Dubois said the French armoured personnel carrier was blown up as it left Sarajevo on a road regularly used by UN vehicles. The explosion happened at 4:00 am (0200 GMT), 150 metres (yards) from a French checkpoint. The soldier died of shrapnel injuries.

Chandrika turns 50:

Sri Lankan President Chandrika B Kumaratunga will celebrate her 50th birthday quietly yesterday with her family members, her office said, PTI reports from Colombo.

The president will spend the day out of Colombo with her two children. She will attend religious ceremonies held to invoke blessings on the country, people and the security forces.

Russia to halt search for Basayev:

Russia agreed Wednesday to abandon its search for rebel Chechen commander Shamil Basayev, but indicated it would not give ground on more sensitive issues such as the constitutional status of Chechnya, AFP reports from Grozny.

Russian negotiators reached an agreement on Basayev with their Chechen counterparts, who assured delegates that the separatist commander, wanted in Moscow for leading a raid two weeks ago on the southern Russian town of Budennovsk, was no longer in Russia.

Noted dance conductor Kurtz dies:

Conductor Efram Kurtz, who came to fame working with American modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan and collaborated with some of the greatest names in Russian ballet, has died, AP reports from London.

Kurtz, who was 94, was born in Russia but spent all his adult life in the west mostly in Germany, Britain and the United States, where he took American citizenship in 1944.

Mob-cop clash claims 14 in Mexico:

Fourteen people were killed and 18 others injured Wednesday when police and a group of squatters clashed in Guerrero state, officials said, AFP reports from Acapulco, Mexico.

Four police officers were among those killed in the confrontation in Aguas Blancas, a town just 36 kilometres (22 miles) outside this Pacific resort city, authorities said.

Anti-slavery task force in Brazil:

A century after a royal decree freed Brazil's slaves the government is still trying to do away with forced labour, AP reports from Brasilia.

To that end, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso announced the creation of a high-level task force to free the "salves of modern Brazil" and punish those who use slave labour.

ROK dissident visits DPRK:

A well-known female South Korean dissident leader illegally traveled to North Korea, following her late husband's footsteps, government officials said Thursday, AP reports from Seoul.

Park Yong-gil, a Christian activist, went to the North in order to attend ceremonies Saturday marking the first anniversary of the death of late North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, her son told reporters.

Anti-N protesters held in USA:

Twenty anti-nuclear protesters were arrested Wednesday after blocking the entrance to a Smithsonian Institution exhibit on the Enola gay, the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, AFP reports from Washington.

The 20, part of a group of several dozen demonstrators inside and outside the museum from a coalition of peace and anti-nuclear activist groups, were charged with creating a "public nuisance".

Sudan vows to defend border from Egyptian attacks

KHARTOUM, June 29:

The Sudanese army warned Egypt today that it would defend to the death the disputed border region of Halaib on the Red Sea, after a clash in which it said two policemen were killed, reports AFP.

"God willing, the Sudanese army in Halaib will show you that their trenches will be their tombs," General Mohammed Bashir Suleiman, the official army spokesman, told state radio.

"Our armed forces will remain in their positions and they will respond to any enemy provoking them. By their presence they confirm that Halaib is Sudanese territory," Suleiman said.

Tension has quickly risen between the two countries since Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak accused Sudan of involvement in an attempt to assassinate him in Addis Ababa on Monday.

The general said a clash be-

tween Egyptian and Sudanese policemen late Tuesday was "an attack against the Sudanese army. We will never allow a repetition of this attack."

"There is no chance for games" when countries turn to arms to settle disputes between them, Suleiman warned. "The language of the gun differs totally from the language of politics."

Sudan accuses Egypt of killing two policemen and wounding seven others in an attack in the border zone, which both nations claim but Egypt controls militarily.

Egypt says Sudanese policemen started the shooting. Doctors at a Cairo military hospital said three Sudanese and three Egyptian troops were injured in the shooting and brought to Cairo for treatment.

Sudanese leader General Omar Al-Bashir said Wednesday that the clashes were "a provocation against Sudan."

Mubarak announced today that he had ordered 70 Sudanese policemen ejected from observation posts in Halaib in response to the seizure by Sudanese troops of three Egyptian embassy residence in Khartoum.

Reuters from Cairo adds: A

gang of about 90 Sudanese broke into three Egyptian government rest houses in Khartoum, assaulted some of the Egyptians and evicted the families, the official Egyptian news agency Mena said today.

The families included that of the Egyptian assistant military attaché in Khartoum, said the agency, monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

It was not immediately clear when the incident happened.

Sudan says two Sudanese policemen were killed and seven wounded when Egyptian troops attacked a Sudanese border post on Tues-

day night. Egypt said six people were wounded.

Relations between the two countries have deteriorated since Monday, when Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said Sudan might have helped the gunmen who tried to kill him in Addis Ababa.

Meanwhile Egypt today expelled 70 Sudanese nationals in response to Sudan's seizure of Egyptian government rest houses in Khartoum, President Hosni Mubarak announced.

"Early this morning I took a decision ordering 70 Sudanese from four points out of the country. They took them away two hours later," Mubarak said in an address broadcast live on state television.

The president did not specify if the Sudanese were civilians or military nor did he locate the "points" but he was apparently referring to observation posts in the disputed border region of Halaib.

Clinton supports plan to solve dispute over F-16s

WASHINGTON, June 29:

President Bill Clinton has given cautious support to a key senator's proposal to solve a dispute with Pakistan over 28 F-16 aircraft blocked from delivery because of Pakistan's nuclear programme, reports Reuters.

Delivery of the planes and other military equipment was blocked in 1990 when President George Bush was unable to certify that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear device.

South Dakota Republican Larry Pressler, author of the nuclear non-proliferation law under which Bush acted, urged Clinton to sell the planes to Taiwan and the Philippines and return to Pakistan all — or some of the money from the sale.

Clinton gave qualified support to the idea in a letter to Pressler released on Wednesday by the senator's office.

Clinton said he had told Pakistan Prime Minister Be-

nazir Bhutto during her trip to Washington in April that he would explore options of returning either the military equipment or the money. "The proposal to sell the planes and return the money is one possibility if we can resolve some areas of concern," his letter said.

But Clinton said the transfer of the equipment to third parties had to be found to be in the US national interest and "we would need to be prepared to return to Pakistan the equipment other than F-16s for which it has paid."

He also said "Such a proposal may make this solution less than satisfactory for the government of Pakistan if it results in the return to Pakistan of significantly less money than they originally paid for the aircraft."

But a solution accepted by Congress and Pakistan would clear the way for discussion of nuclear non-proliferation issues and improve US Pakistan relations, he added.



Protesters demonstrate against the opening of the Enola Gay exhibit outside of the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. The protesters called the B-29 Enola Gay, the plane that flew the atomic bombing mission over Hiroshima, Japan, a destructive symbol that should not be in a museum commemorating human achievement. — AFP/UNB photo

LTTE claims to have wiped out northern military base

COLOMBO, June 29: One

day after Tamil rebels killed at least 86 soldiers and four civilians in a military camp, they said Thursday they had destroyed it and stolen all its weapons, reports AP.

The rebels said only seven of their cadres were killed when they crossed a shallow lagoon early Wednesday to storm the garrison on Mandativu island, 180 miles north of Colombo.

AFP adds, a huge force of guerrillas from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) pulverised the army-held islet of Mandativu just before dawn Wednesday leaving 90 soldiers and an estimated 50 rebels killed, a military statement said.

The LTTE in a statement issued from its London office said only seven rebels were killed in the fighting and gave military losses at "over 60" killed.

"In an operation that lasted four hours, the Tigers overran the main military base as well as all mini camps and sentry posts in the area. Over 60 army men were killed and over 700 others fled the island, the LTTE said.

It said the guerrillas captured 200 automatic weapons and 300 other firearms and a large haul of ammunition.

The deaths at Mandativu, just outside the LTTE-held Jaffna Peninsula, raised to 166 the death toll during a 10-hour orgy of violence across Sri Lanka's embattled north-

ern and eastern regions, military figures showed.

In separate incidents, the LTTE also set off a landmine under police jeep in the northcentral Anuradhapura district, killing eight constables and two civilians.

Tigers shot dead four soldiers and three homeguards in two gun battles elsewhere in the northeast and lost four of their own men. Five more LTTE men were killed when a landmine they were priming went off accidentally.

The casualties also brought to 450 the military death toll since the LTTE pulled out of peace talks with the government on April 19 to resume their protracted campaign for independence.



US Vice-President Al Gore (L) shakes hands with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin (R) as they meet at Moscow airport Vnukovo II Wednesday. Gore arrived in Moscow to take part in a joint Russian-American Commission on economic and technological cooperation. — AFP/UNB photo

SLORC signs ceasefire with Mon rebels

MOULMEIN, Myanmar, June 29: Myanmar's ruling military junta signed a ceasefire today with Mon rebels, who agreed to end to more than 40 years of armed resistance to Yangon, reports AFP.

In an elaborate official ceremony in Moulmein, capital of the Mon state, the 7,000-member New Mon State Party (NMSP) agreed to end its guerrilla operations in exchange for Yangon's pledge of development assistance.

A 27-member NMSP delegation led by Vice-Chairman Nai Htin, 72, attended the ceremony at the southeastern military command Headquarters, which was addressed by Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, first secretary of the junta.

SA okays bill to put tribal leaders on govt payroll

CAPE TOWN, June 29: The South African parliament on Wednesday passed a bill to put tribal leaders on the government payroll, but Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Zulu-based party promised an immediate constitutional challenge, reports Reuters.

In the last vote before a four-week winter recess, the National Assembly approved a bill shifting responsibility for paying tribal leaders from provinces to the president.

The law was passed despite opposition from Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party, which said it violated a clause of the interim constitution protecting the rights of traditional leaders.

Australia won't cancel defence ties with France

CANBERRA, June 29: Despite France's plan to resume nuclear tests in the South Pacific, Australia will not cancel existing defence contracts with French firms because that would harm Australian workers, Defence Minister Robert Ray said Thursday, reports AP.

Ray said his department had already taken strong action against France, stopping any consideration of French firms for major contracts for the duration of the eight tests, due to start in September and probably continue into 1996.

Ray told the Senate there were a variety of reasons not to cancel the defence contracts.

"The first reason is that we would thereby be found in breach of contract in any court and litigated against," he said.

He said cancellations would also halt the Australian defence projects by months or years, punishing Australia, not France.



Supermodel Claudia Schiffer at London's Harrods store on Wednesday to launch her book "Memoires," telling of her life in pictures from nursery days in Germany to her first test shots as a camera-shy teenager to stunning covers for Vogue and Elle magazines. — AFP/UNB photo

It was a clock-radio!

SYDNEY: About 350 people were evacuated from a United Airlines jumbo jet at Sydney Airport on Thursday after a passenger found a suspected bomb under a seat, but bomb disposal experts later determined it was a harmless clock-radio, reports Reuters.

Some passengers on the Los Angeles to Sydney flight broke into tears, held hands and prayed after the battered old radio was found by a teenage girl under a row of empty seats less than two hours out of Sydney.

The radio was thought to have been left there by a passenger on the flight who became too embarrassed to claim it, an airline official told reporters.

"We had a few people that sort of like came unstuck and started holding hands and praying and wishing it would be a successful landing," one man told state radio after the plane landed. "Some people were crying."

"We were all terrified," another passenger told Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio.

Stinking hobby

DELTONA, Fla: Hundreds of rats have been exterminated at the home of an elderlyman who kept them as pets, feeding them and living with them, possibly for years, officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

More than 230 rats were killed but dozens more could be hidden in the walls, floor and ceilings of a house belonging to Angelo Russo, 76, who was taken to a hospital last week for psychiatric evaluation, officials said.

Sheriff's deputies were called to Russo's home in a quiet residential neighbourhood by a utility company worker who spotted rodents in the yard.

The first deputies on the scene said they could smell the stench of urine 200 feet (60 metres) from the front door, said Volusia county Sheriff's office spokesman Gary Davidson. When they opened the door, there were rats everywhere, he said.

Apparently it was pretty disgusting. There was an inch of rat droppings all over the floor," Davidson said.

Tony Tan new 2nd DPM of Singapore

SINGAPORE, June 29: The appointment of respected banker Tony Tan as a second Deputy Prime Minister has caught Singaporeans by surprise and rekindled speculation about the ruling party's political plans, reports AFP.

But there was unanimous praise for the 55-year-old Tan, a physicist and mathematician by training, once named by modern Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, as his first choice to succeed him as Prime Minister.

Tan declined the offer, and Lee was succeeded by incumbent Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, 54.

Poverty pushes minor girls into prostitution in India

NEW DELHI, June 29: India's child prostitute population, reputedly the world's largest, is growing alarmingly due to poverty and the fear of AIDS, according to authorities and activists, reports AFP.

Increasing numbers of young girls are being pushed into the flesh trade by poor families, and almost a quarter of India's estimated 2.3 million prostitutes are minors under 18-years-old, activists say.

"India has the largest number of child prostitutes," said Khaurati Lal Bhola, a crusader against prostitution and advisor to the government on the

subject. "Child prostitution is increasing rapidly."

"What is the worth of a country where poverty forces people to trade their daughters for rice?" asks 67-year-old Bhola, who runs schools for children of prostitutes.

"And now people who fear AIDS are demanding young girls when they visit brothels," Bhola added. "Naturally, the brothel keepers and pimps are forcing more and more girls into sex."

"There is definitely an increasing trend in child prostitution," added Brinda Karat, a left-wing activist.

"Girls as young as 13 years of age are being forced into

the profession," she said.

Officials and activists blame grinding poverty and the fear of AIDS for the sudden spiral in child prostitution, along with governmental apathy and collusion of the police with pimps and brothel owners.

Most prostitutes in the 1,000-plus red light districts across India are drawn from poor families and forced into the profession because of poverty, and end up earning meagre amounts in towns and cities.

Their children, shunned by society, frequently swell the sex-trade ranks.

Brinda said a drop in moral

values and increasing sexual perversion were also contributory factors.

"We are in an age where people want to have whatever they desire," she said. "For the mass of poor, prostitution is, unfortunately, a survival strategy."

"Some men look for virgins, so they abuse children. Then there is police collusion and official apathy abductions of minors are not taken seriously," she said.

The government insists it is concerned.

"We are worried," said an officer in the Ministry of Human Resource Development. "It is wrong to say the gov-

ernment is not bothered. We concede the matter demands more attention."

The activists are quick to challenge the claim.

"The government does not have the will," asserted Bhola, who moves with a police guard following attacks on him by brothel owners. "The police, everybody has a vested interest in prostitution."

"If the government wants, they can end child prostitution," he added.

Women's groups say child prostitutes become mental and physical wrecks sooner than their adult counterparts

Kenneth Kaunda regains party leadership

LUSAKA, Zambia, June 29: Former president Kenneth Kaunda has recaptured the leadership of the political party he founded and said Thursday he was confident of regaining power in Zambia, reports AP.

The veteran politician, who led this Southern African nation to independence and ruled for 27 years until losing democratic elections in 1991, told supporters he wanted to reunite a nation divided by mismanagement and officials' graft.

"But unless there is a radical change in government thinking, child prostitution is most unlikely to disappear," Brinda said.

"I think it will only go up in the time to come."