US pledges \$ 12m to UN: The United States piedged more than 12 million dollars during talks this week to support UN mine-clearing efforts worldwide, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said Friday, AFP reports from Washington.

Former US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance attended the UN meeting in Geneva where he pledged on behalf of President Bill Clinton's administration 12.5 million dollars for the efforts, Burns said, noting that many landmine victims are children.

Kovacs wins Piano Competition: Kriszta Kovacs, a 24-year-old pianist from Szobieski, Hungary, won the World Piano Competition on Friday, AP reports from Cincinnati.

Ron Regey, 19, of Tel Aviv, took second place. Yun Sun Kaywin, a pianist from China who now lives in New York City, was judged third.

Plane crashes in Alaska, 6 killed: An airplane taking cruise-ship passengers on a sightseeing tour crashed Friday into the side of a mountain, killing the pilot and all five tourists, AP reports from Haines, Alaska.

Wreckage from the single-engine Piper Cherokee was strewn down the mountainside after the 3 pm crash near Pyramid Harbou, about 80 miles (130 kilometres) northwest of Juneau.

Mob torch 21 houses in Allahabad: Altogether 21 houses of a particular community were burnt Friday in village Dilergani in Pratapgarh district when people of two different community clashed over the alleged raping of a girl and kidnapping of the gram pradhan, according to the DIG, Allahabad range, PTI reports from Allahabad

The police said eight persons have been arrested and FIRs against 30 other persons were lodged. The situation was stated to be tense but under control. Contingents of police have been deployed in the affected village.

Kim Il Sung's body on public display: In a carefully orchestrated show of continuity, North Korea put the body of its "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung on public display Saturday the first anniversary of his death, AP reports from Seoul.

The solemn ceremonies came hours after a memorial service where signs indicated that Kim's son and designated heir, Kim Jong II, is in control of the reclusive communist country.

Albanian court frees Ramiz Alia: Ramiz Alia, the last communist president of Albania, was unexpectedly freed from prison Friday after serving less than two years of what had originally been a nine-year sentence, AFP reports from Tirana.

"I am very happy because I did not expect to be freed today," Alia, 69, who had spent 540 days in prison told reporters waiting outside the jail. Asked if he would return to politics, he said, "I can't say anything for the moment, but I am a political man."

Saudi fund for US mosque: Saudi Arabia's King Fahd has donated four million US dollars to build a mosque in Los Angeles, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said yesterday, Reuter reports from Dubai.

It quoted Saudi ambassador Prince Bandar Bin Sultan in Washington as saying the donation covers the entire cost of the building, which will serve 250,000 Muslims in Los Angeles.

Dalai Lama's birthday observed: Thousands of Tibetans marked the birthday of their god-king, the Dalai Lama, in defiance of the Chinese government, an international human rights group reported Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

The Dalai Lama, in exile in India since leading a failed uprising against Chinese rule in 1959, turned 60 on Thursday.

Mandela ends East Asia tour: South African President Nelson Mandela ended a week-long visit to East Asia yesterday with an appeal to the South Korean parliament for closer economic ties, Reuter reports from Seoul.

Mandela, making the first ever trip to South Korea by a South African head of state said the post-apartheid Pretoria government was proud to be associated with the dynamic economic powerhouses of East Asia.

Jyoti Basu turns 82: The West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, turned 82 yesterday, PTI reports from Calcutta. The longest serving chief minister in the country, Basu is now in London

on the last leg of his current foreign tour to woo investors for West Bengal's

industrial development. Japan deports 3662 foreigners: Japan's immigration bureau deported 3,662 foreign nationals from mid-

May to early June, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo. Illegal workers accounted for about 90 per cent or 3,318 of the total,

the immigration officials said. Tamil Tigers kill one seaman:

Tamil Tiger separatist guerillas opened fire on a navy boat off Sri Lanka's northeastern coast vesterday killing one sailor and wounding four others, military officials said, AFP reports from Colombo. "There had been an exchange of fire but we still don't know if there

were any terrorist casualties," a military official said by telephone from Trincomalee, 257 kilometers north to Colombo.

Chechen talks resume in Grozny: Peace talks in the breakaway republic of Chechnya resumed Saturday with a minute of silence for eight people slain in a raid on a farmhouse near the capital of Grozny, AP reports from Grozny.

Saturday was declared an official day of mourning for the victims of the raid Friday, with both sides condemning the killings before resuming the negotiations.

Clashes leave 61 dead in Somalia: At least 61 people have been killed in central Somalia and the capital Mogadishu in fighting between rival clan militias in the past week, Somalia sources and militia officials said yesterday, Reuter reports from Mogadishu.

Most of the fighting took place in central Somalia between supporters of General Mohamed Farah Aideed's Habre Gedir Clan and those of the Marehan Clan of the Somalia National Front (SNF) of late dictator Mohamed Siad Barre.

Storm kills 300 egrets in China: Gale-force winds and a rainstorm killed more than 300 egrets and damaged 40 to 100 ancient cypresses in China's most famous Confucian temple, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

The storm July 1 did not kill any people, but flooding from heavy rainfall since May has already caused nearly 1,200 deaths. Official reports say China's longest river, the Yangtze, is dangerously high, raising the possibility of more severe flooding and deaths.

ROK PM apologises for shopping mall collapse

was corruption and irregularities in

our society, he was quoted as saying

at a meeting with his top aides,

adding: I'll push for the elimination of

Rescue workers today piled up

sand bags and installed water pumps

to fight monsoon rains and sprayed

disinfectant twice a day over the

site, which was thick with stench of

ment and televised nationally, the

prime minister said his government

would carry out immediate safety

checks of apartment blocks and all

multi-use public buildings built since

in the high rise apartment buildings

that make up Seoul's five satellite ci-

ties, should be "freed of the anxiety

Seoul's dormitory satellite towns

of the danger of collapse," he said.

The public, especially those living

In his apology, made in parlia-

decomposing bodies.

corruption as resolutely as before."

SEOUL, July 8: South Korean Premier Le Hong-Koo today personally apologised for the shopping centre collapse which killed or injured more than 1,000 people, and pledged immediate safety checks of Seoul's high rises, reports AFP.

The death toll from the Sampoong Department Store collapse rose to 148 after four more bodies were dug out today from the monsoon rain-dranched rubble of what used to be posh five-storey shopping centre, city hall said.

More than 900 were injured and over 200 others are missing and unaccounted for after the plush but shoddily-built shopping centre caved in under its own weight here nine days ago, burying hundreds of people.

"I, as head of the cabinet, feel a strong responsibility and offer my sincere apologies for the collapse, the prime minister said in a report on the state administration presented to the national assembly.

were hurriedly built between late 1980s and the early 1990s under an Lee's apology came as President Kim Young-Sam today blamed "corruption and irregularities in our

society" for the disaster.

"The root cause of the disaster

overly ambitious government-led projector to provide two million new houses and apartments across the Egypt, UK, US, blamed for trying to destabilise Sudanese govt

International =

KHARTOUM, July 8: Sudan on Friday accused Egypt, Britain and the United States of engaging in joint military manoeuvres in the Red Sea to try to destabilise the government in Khartoum, reports AFP.

Information Minister Abdul Basit Sabdarat said the manoeuvres disturb the state of security in the region and were a "plot against Sudan which had always called for maintaining the Red Sea as a peaceful region. Sabdarat, quoted by the news-

papers Akhbar Al Youm and Al Raci Al Akhtar, said "Egypt does what is dictated to her, is being used to implement US policies and is a base for foreign fleets whose influence threatens the Middle East region.

"This is not new for the Egyptian government he said adding that Sudan had been monitoring these conspiracy manoeuvres for a long time."

There was no immediate confirmation in Cairo Friday that the manoeuvres were talking place.

However, a bi-weekly Egyptian Islamist paper Al Shaab reported Friday that these week long manoeuvres started on Wednesday in the Red Sea north of the Halabib order area which is disputed by Khartoum and Cairo.

Egyptian destroyers and warships British and American frigates as well as a US marine unit of 465 soldiers are taking part in the manoeuvres it said.

Relations between Egypt and Sudan have deteriorated since Cairo accused Khartoum of being implicated in a failed attempt to kill Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa on June 26, a charge which Sudan has denied.

AFP from Cairo adds: Britain, Egypt and the United States were

The week-long military exercise. which began on Wednesday, involves warships from all three countries and Egyptian fighter jets in mock fighting north of the Halaib border zone which Egypt and Sudan dispute, the

Sudan on Friday said the military exercise, which began at the Red Sea port of Safaga, was a threat to its security and accused Britain and the United States of plotting with Egypt to destabilise its Islamist military government.

tian President Hosni Mubarak impli-

Meanwhile, Egypt has decided to impose visa requirements for the first time on Sudanese people entering the country, the Foreign Ministry said to-

The Egyptian consulate general in Khartoum has started from today to apply these new measures, which have become obligatory for all Su-

"The visa will last a month," the official said, adding there would be no charge for the service 'as a sign of appreciation from Egypt for the fraternal and eternal relations uniting the

June 26, a charge which Khartoum de-

Off the Record

To leave or

not to leave ...

LONDON: Actress and Estee Lauder model Liz Hurley flew back Thursday from three days in France for a face-to-face with errant boyfriend Hugh Grant at their London apartment, reports AP.

A friend said afterwards she's still undecided whether or not to leave him

over his fling with a Hollywood hooker. "She's not yet made up her mind," Henry Dent-Brocklehurst told re-

Wearing dark glasses, skin-tight white pants and a skimpy white top that left her midriff bare, Miss Hurley, 29, emerged from the apartment after two hours inside with Grant but said nothing to reporters before being

driven away in a cab. Newspaper reports said she looked emotionally drained and might have

Grant, 34, also refused to speak when he left the apartment later and drove off in his car.

The raffish star of the movie "Four Weddings and a Funeral," was arrested June 27 in Los Angeles with a prostitute, Stella Marie Thompson. Both were charged with engaging in a lewd act in a public place, and are due

in court July 18.

... Because he has cloth allergy

COLOMBO: An 18-year-old Sri Lankan coconut plucker has refused to wear a stitch of clothing since the day he was born, the Island newspaper said vesterday, reports Reuter.

RM Prematilleka, from the village of Madagama, 90 miles east of Colombo, no sooner tries to cover up and his whole body starts to itch, the newspaper said, but his allergy has not stopped him plucking nuts.

"Prematilleka, who continues to live in the raw, is an export in plucking coconuts and areca nuts (betel nuts). His mother refused to allow photographs to be taken of her son.

Desire to redo Princess Di

LONDON: Vivienne Westwood, an often outrageous British designer with a penchant for bare bottoms and platform shoes, wants to redo Princess Di. From the feet up, reports AP.

"I hate her shoes - those horrible little pumps that are neither one thing nor the other," said Westwood, whose ultra-high platform shoes once sent model Naomi Campbell toppling off the catwalk. Known as a pioneer of the punk street style. Westwood told Woman

and Home magazine that Diana is "ruled by the trends."

"It's as though her clothes are supposed to tell you she's both a feminist and sexy at the same time," she says in the July issues.

No permission even for one cigar

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, England: The Royal Shakespeare Company is furning because one of its actors can't, reports AP.

Local officials refused to permit actor Mark Lockyer to smoke a cigar in Anton Chekhov's play, "The Cherry Orchard." So Lockyer, who plays the servant Vasha, has to suck a cold stogie and mime the smoke.

"We feel that we observe the highest safety procedures, and we are just absolutely confident that the smoking of one single cigar in a play which absolutely demands it would not endanger anyone," theatre spokeswoman Helen Cross said Friday.

Kashmiri factions call for release of tourists

SRINAGAR, July 8: Most guerilla groups in the northern state of a Jammu-Kashmir Saturday distanced themselves from the kidnapping of took place. American and British tourists and called for their immediate release, re-

The call for freeing the two Americans and two Britons taken hostage by Muslim separatists on Wednesday was issued by Sayeed Salauddin, the chief of the Hizbul Mujahedeen, the biggest separatist militia fighting for secession of Kashmir from India.

Many separatist groups had joined the call, Salauddin's statement said. But the Harkat ul-Ansar, a pro-Pakistan militant group believed to be involved in the kidnapping did

Officials continued efforts to contact the rebels of Al-Faran, a littleknown group, which has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. Indian officials suspect that Al-Faran is a front group of the Harkat-ul-Ansar, which has been involved in kidnappings.

Some 2,250 Indian soldiers and commandos on Friday searched the remote area where the kidnapping The rebels say that the hostages

were unharmed and safe.

John Childs, of Simsbury, Connecticut, and Donald Fred Hutchings, of Spokane, Washington along with Britons Paul Wells, 23, of London, and Keith Mangan, 33, of Middlesbrough were abducted during a trek near the tourist town of Pahalgam. The ages of the two American were not available.

Also captured were in American woman, two British women, a Canadian man and two Kashmiri guides, but the rebels freed them Wednesday with a note demanding the release of 21 jailed guerillas. On Friday, New Delhi-based

American and British embassy officials met with pro-separatist leaders in an attempt to open channels of communications with the rebels.

The abductions were the third of Western tourists in the last year. All previous hostages have been freed unharmed.

Iraq refuses to destroy missile machines He also said Iraq had promised to

UNITED NATIONS, July 8: Iraq said Friday it will not destroy five machines that could be used to make ballistic missile parts until UN monitors finish their investigation of Baghdad's biological weapons programme, reports AP. Also Friday, UN diplomats said

they expected the Security Council on Tuesday to extend its crushing economic embargo against Iraq for another 60 days. "I don't expect any change in the sanctions regime," said British Am-

bassador David Hannay. Iraq must fully cooperate with the weapons inspectors before an easing

of the 5-year-old embargo could be considered.

Rolf Ekeus, the chief UN weapons inspector, said earlier this week that Iraq had refused to destroy five pieces of equipment related to its

His steps towards improved rela-

progress in Vietnam's accounting of

on its past biological weapons pro-Iraq has admitted that it produced large amounts of botulism and anthrax as part of a biological warfare

submit by late July a complete report

programme. Iraqi Ambassador Nizar Hamdoon, in a Friday letter to the council, said Baghdad would postpone de-

struction of the equipment "until the biology file is disposed of posi-Security Council members have said they see no prospects for easing

the sanctions until Iraq abides by UN resolutions demanding the dismantling and monitoring of its programmes for weapons of mass destruction. But the council is divided as to

what to do if the monitors produce a positive report later this year.

US policy of turning old enemies into friends poses risks proves that it will be fully coopera-Clinton administration and regimes in US support for UN peacekeeping.

- AFP/UNB photo

WASHINGTON, July 8: Turning old enemies into new friends plays well on the world stage, but the Clinton administration's latest softening towards Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea and even politically isolated Myanmar poses risks at home, reports

Announcement is expected any day of a resumption of normal relations with Vietnam, formally ending a bitter era. The war that killed 58,000 Americans and 3.4 million Vietnamese has tainted US politics for decades. Now Secretary of State Warren Chrisptopher is planning a visit to

Hanoi. Havana will not be on any Christopher travel schedule for the foreseeable future, but officials, for the first time, are talking about allowing US news media to open bureaus in Communist Cuba.

And after an accord with Cuban President Fidel Castro over the return of refugees fleeing his regime, US officials are talking about increasing communication between Americans and Cubans.

North Korea is already on tap for 100 metric tons of US heavy oil. American diplomats will shortly be in Pyongyang looking for a site to set up a diplomatic office. And the largest US long-distance phone company finally has approval to set up service.

In Myanmar where US officials have vehemently protested the house arrest of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, a handful of American Narcotics Agents are cooperating with Myanmar officials in an unprecedented joint effort to root out drug traffickers. All this pleasantness between the

the United States has long condemned is cheering US businesses seeking new investment opportunities abroad, governments seeking free trade among all nations and groups working for a more harmonious world. But any overtures to Vietnam

raise concerns among groups seeking a full accounting of missing US soldiers. Friendliness towards Cuba angers Cuban exiles in Miami and across the southeastern United States. And both the latest accord with North Korea and the dealings with Myanmar military authorities have prompted protests in Congress and elsewhere.

It all comes at a time when Congress is completing work on a sharply reduced foreign aid bill and debating whether to make deep cuts

Republicans are not about to give Clinton credit for any foreign policy successes, particularly when they involve relations with the world's few remaining communist regimes.

Even the vastly improved US relations with Russia which developed under Republican administrations are getting careful scrutiny on Capitol Hill, where some lawmakers are trying to minimize aid to President Boris Yeltsin's government, reflecting doubts about Russian democracy's future.

Greater doubts abound over the prospects for productive relations with regimes still hanging onto communism after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

nerability in dealing with Vietnam to-

Clinton's record as a Vietnam War protester also has increased his vul-

tions have the backing of Vietnam war veterans in the Senate, including former war prisoner Republican John McCain, but they will be looking for

missile programme.

1,619 missing Americans. The fact that the 1996 presidential campaign has already begun adds to the delicacy of Clinton's decisions in opening doors to formerly un-

friendly nations. At every turn of policy, he faces Sens. Bob Dole and Phil Gramm, ma

jor combatants for the Republican nomination.

Dole has introduced a resolution urging the administration to move slowly. He joined seven other Republican senators in introducing a bill that would block funding for diplomatic relations unless Vietnam

tive on the issue of missing Other Congressional critics

tacked a provision on a foreign aid bill that would prohibit any funding of cooperative efforts with Myanmar But the dirs 4 billion in foreign in-

vestments Myanmar expects this fiscal year could overshadow such con-Similar opportunities are being

touted in other communist countries. Cuba has announced it will begin setting up free trade zones to attract

foreign capital despite an ongoing economic embargo. North Korea is banking on US and South Korean help in building its nuclear power industry. And Vietnam is evolving into Asia's next booming car market, with Ford Motor Co.



Egyptian newspapers reported to-

newspapers said.

war of words with Cairo since Egypcated Sudan in a failed attempt to assassinate him in Addis Ababa on

Khartoum has been involved in a

danese people," an official said.

two peoples." Relations between the two neighbouring countries have deteriorated since Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak implicated Sudan in a failed attempt to kill him in Addis Ababa on

Cambodian troops

kill 21 Khmer

guerillas

Cambodian troops have killed 21

Khmer Rouge guerillas, including a

high-ranking rebel officer, in continu-

ing fighting near the Thai border in

the northwest, a senior military offi-

have been engaged in fierce fighting

in the vicinity of the key Khmer

Rouge base at Klar Ngap (dead tiger

village) just 100 to 200 metres (yards)

from Thailand in Banteay Meanchey

Klar Ngap is a strategically impor-

"The fighting is still going on", a

tant position on the approach to the

Khmer Rouge military stronghold of

senior military intelligence officer

told AFP. "Our aim is to keep moving

forward to Klar Ngap and then may be

to Phnom Malai, but we will wait to

think about Malai until after we take

More bomb attacks

threatened

in Colombo

tremist group Saturday threatened

more bomb attacks in Colombo in re-

taliation for alleged military atroci-

ties against the ethnic Tamil minority

are used (by the military) as human

detectors of land mines", the Ellalan

Force, a little-known militant group,

said in a statement that was mailed

to The Associated Press office in

government appoint a commission to

investigate its charges, or it would

explode "massive bombs in several

places in Colombo on July 9 and 10."

businessmen to stay away from

Colombo. "The Tamils are being

killed by funds from your visits and

investments. Withdraw your invest-

ments from Sri Lanka immediately,"

Ocean island reached a record

Tourist arrivals in the Indian

the Elialan Force warned.

400,000 last year.

It warned tourists and foreign

The group demanded that the

"Tamils in the eastern province

in the east, reports AP.

Colombo.

COLOMBO, July 8: A Tamil ex-

Guerillas and government troops

cial said today, reports AFP.

province for several days.

Phnom Malai.

Klar Ngap.

PHNOM PENH, July 8:

holding the most important naval June 26.

French UN soldiers watch Friday the site where they have installed a tank with its gun turret pointing towards — AFP/UNB photo Bosnian Serb positions around Sarajevo.

Strike protesting death of MQM leader cripples Karachi

KARACHI, July 8: A strike called by the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) paralysed Pakistan's southern city of Karachi for a second day today, reports

An MQM spokesman said the

death of a former MQM municipal councillor in police custody had dealt a blow to peace talks expected to start with the government in Islamabad on Sunday. "We are 101 per cent prepared for talks with the government. But how

people are being killed?" said the spokesman, Shoaib Bukhari, been planning to travel to Islamabad on Sunday, but the government has

can we justify negotiations when our

said only that a date for the talks would be announced on that day. One newspaper, the English-language daily The Nation, reported that **Education Minister Khurshid Ahmad** Shah would go to London on Sunday

for talks with the MQM's self-exiled

leader Altaf Hussain. There was no

immediate confirmation.

The MOM called for its two-day strike to be extended to Sunday and Monday after the death on Friday of former Councillor Aslam Sabzwari, who was arrested by police on Thursday.

tortured before his arrest and died of a heart attack. Witnesses said shops and businesses were shut today and traffic was thin, with most of the city's es-

timated 12 million people staying at

lice torture. Police say he had been

The MQM says he died under po-

home for fear of violence. "Karachi is tense, but calm," A five-member MQM team had deputy superintendent of police Khawaja Nisar told Reuters. Police sources said security

forces had mounted raids in the east-

ern MQM stronghold of Alfalah

Society on Friday night, but gave no details of the results. Ambulance workers said they had picked up the body of a woman hit by stray bullets in the eastern Orangi

area early in the morning. They said

two people had been reported killed in western Pak colony. Police could not confirm the deaths. "Three people, including a 12-

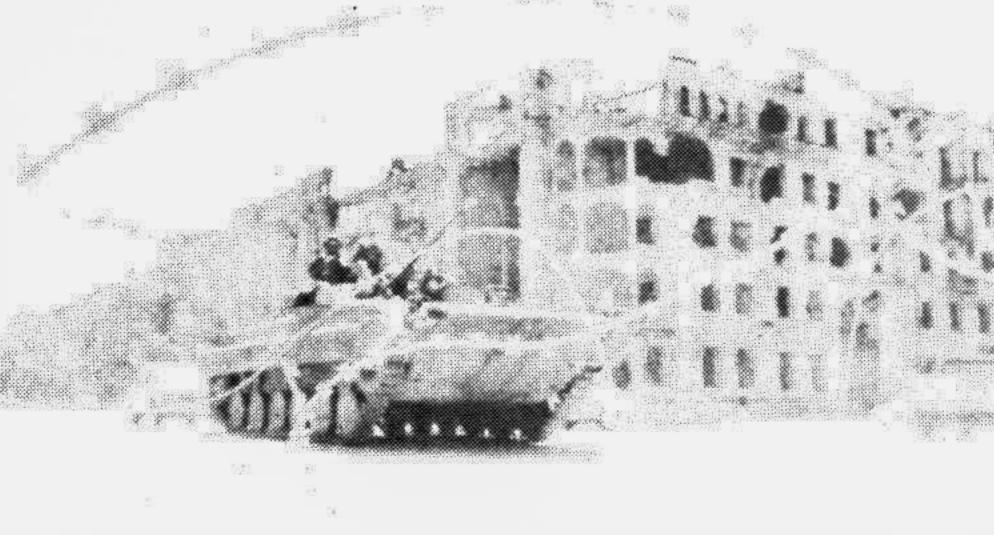
vear-old girl, were wounded in two

separate shooting incidents elsewhere in the city. In the nearby city of Hyderabad, five gunmen walked into Phuleli Police Station overnight and opened fire, killing a policeman and wound-

ing two before escaping on foot, police said. The MQM has vowed to close down Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city and economic powerhouse, every weekend until the government releases detainees and arrests those involved in an alleged gang rape of an MOM activist's sister and the killing

of an MQM leader. Bukhari said the MQM was not trying to evade peace talks with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government and was sincerely seeking an end to the violence blighting the city.

"This does not mean that Mohaiirs can be cowed by force.



A Russian APC patrols along the street with destroyed buildings and barbed wire in Grozny on Thursday. The third round of Russian-Chechen peace negotiations began Thursday in Grozny. Russian authorities have denied reports of Russian advances against Chechen separatists as negotiators from both sides in the conflict prepare to

meet with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.