

BRIEFLY

Kuwait detains 200 Iraqis: Kuwaiti police have detained up to 200 Iraqis seeking refuge on Kuwait's Failaka Island, Interior Minister Sheikh Sabah said Saturday, AFP reports from Kuwait City.

2 cops shot dead in Australia: A man shot and killed two policemen probing a domestic dispute in a resort town near Sydney on Sunday and then shot himself, a police spokesman said, AFP reports from Sydney.

Benazir ends Malaysia tour: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto left yesterday for Islamabad after a three-day visit in Kuala Lumpur to garner Malaysian investments, AFP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Egypt to execute 3 more: Egypt's high State Security Court yesterday condemned three Islamic militants to death and sentenced five others to life in hard labour for murder and rioting, legal sources said, AFP reports from Cairo.

13000 Iranians held in 3 months: Security forces in Iran have arrested more than 13,000 people in three months for smuggling millions of dollars worth of contraband including firearms, vehicles and boats, Iranian television reported, Reuter says from Nicosia.

Serbs abduct 7 Dutch UN troops: Seven Dutch peacekeepers have been taken prisoner by the Bosnian Serbs who over ran three UN observation posts in their attack on the Srebrenica enclave in eastern Bosnia, UN officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Sarajevo.

Qatari Emir calls for peace: The new Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, called for peace between Arabs and said he would try to resolve Qatar's border conflicts with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, AFP reports from Doha.

2 most-wanted Aum members held: Japanese police yesterday arrested two male members of the doomsday Aum Shinri Kyo (Supreme Truth sect) who were on a nationwide most-wanted list for suspected involvement in the Tokyo subway gassing, a police spokesman said, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Hassan against free schooling: Moroccan King Hassan II has criticised the principle of free schooling for all children and come out strongly against proposals to make Arabic the sole language used in teaching, AFP reports from Rabat.

Israeli shells kill 2 in Lebanon: An Israeli tank shelled the south Lebanon town of Nabatiyah, killing a 16-year-old girl and her 11-year-old sister, police said yesterday, Reuter reports from Nabatiyah, Lebanon.

Turkish PM starts C Asia tour: Prime Minister Tansu Ciller flew to Uzbekistan on Sunday in a visit to restore political relations and improve economic ties, AP reports from Ankara.

Congress (I), opposition preparing for polls
NEW DELHI, July 9: India's ruling Congress (I) Party and a divided opposition have begun preparing for general elections next year which are widely expected to end up in a hung parliament, reports AFP.

Yeltsin's adviser on arms trade, told reporters recently that Antel, which makes anti-aircraft systems, would be the first company to receive the right to sign contracts.

Chechens free 3 more Russian POWs
GROZNY, July 9: Chechen officials Sunday turned three prisoners of war over to the Russian delegation at the peace negotiations in Grozny, news agencies reported, says AP.

Russia plans to liberalise policy to boost arms sales
MOSCOW, July 9: Russia is planning to allow major weapons manufacturers to sign deals independently over the coming months in a bid to boost arms sales, industry experts said here, reports AFP.

KSA, Oman to sign new maps today
MUSCAT, July 9: Oman and Saudi Arabia finished marking their common border after a 1,350-day study and are expected to sign the new maps on Monday, an Omani official said Saturday, reports AFP.

Lankan troops launch major offensive against LTTE

COLOMBO, July 9: Heavily armed infantry troops backed by an indefinite curfew launched a much-awaited offensive against Tamil Tiger guerrillas in northern Sri Lanka, military sources said, reports AFP.

An estimated 10,000 soldiers were involved in the operation codenamed 'Leap Forward' to advance into territory held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in their Jaffna stronghold, the sources said.

"We still don't know if they made contact with the enemy," a military source said, adding that aircraft and navy gunboats were standing by to assist ground troops who launched the offensive from their Palaly Army and Airforce Base.

The military clamped an indefinite curfew across the LTTE dominated Jaffna Peninsula, curfews in Jaffna cannot be imposed by the security forces but it gives pilots an open licence to bomb vehicles violating the no-go restriction.

A military spokesman here said they were awaiting details of the operation which came a day after President Chandrika Kumaratunga said her government was ready to battle the LTTE and restore peace in embattled regions.

"If peace cannot be achieved by peaceful means, we will resort to any means to restore peace," Kumaratunga said at the launch of a campaign called 'White Lotus' to raise 15 million dollars for the welfare of soldiers fighting Tigers.

A front organisation of the LTTE has already threatened to bomb Colombo if the government failed to probe the alleged military use of civilians as human shields in the island's multi-ethnic eastern province.

The warning issued by the Eelam Force (EF) was received here Saturday by international news agencies barely 12 hours after the expiry of a Friday night deadline set by the group for Kumaratunga to order an inquiry into the claims.

"If the request of the Eelam Force was accepted by the government before the deadline, the bomb-planted locations will be informed immediately," said the one-page type-written EF letter sent by ordinary mail.

Police said they considered the EF a front of the LTTE and security was being tightened here. The EF had earlier accepted responsibility for last month's failed bomb attack on the Colombo International Airport.

Meanwhile, security was further tightened in the Sri Lankan capital and suburbs today amid fears of revenge attacks by Tamil rebels following a major military drive against them in the north, officials said.

Armed police were deployed at key road intersections, vehicles were checked for car-bombs and buses screened for cadres from the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who may have slipped into the capital, officials said.

"We have been on a high state of alert for a long time. But with the new developments we have decided to further tighten security in Colombo and other urban areas," a senior police official said.

The stepped up security followed the launching of major military assault on LTTE positions in the north and a warning by a shadowy Tamil group, believed to be a front for rebels, that they would set off bombs in the capital.

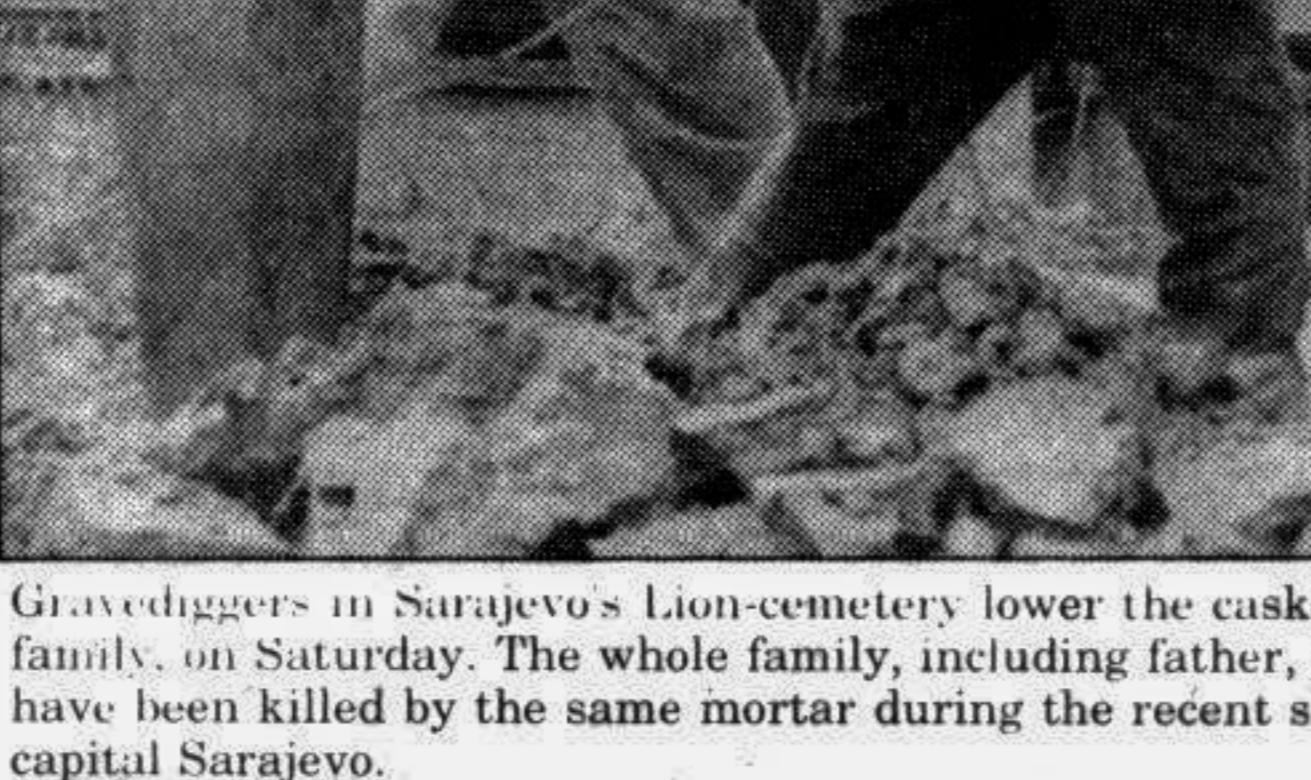
Reuter adds, a small bomb exploded in a park in the heart of the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo, today but no one was hurt, police said.

"It was a small blast which left a hole in the ground a few inches deep," Deputy Inspector General of police in charge of Colombo Chandra Fernando told Reuters, "no one was injured."

The blast came on the day Tamil militants had threatened to bomb Colombo in retaliation for killings of members of the minority group by the armed forces.

Another report says, a Sri Lankan airforce helicopter came under attack by Tamil Tiger guerrillas during a major military advance on the rebel-held northern Jaffna Peninsula, military sources said.

The aircraft was hit by a heavy machine gun but it managed to carry out an emergency landing inside the Palaly Army and Airforce Base from where some 10,000 troops launched a pre-dawn offensive on the rebels.



Argentine President Carlos Menem greets supporters as he leaves the legislative palace in Buenos Aires on Saturday after being sworn in for his second term. He is accompanied by his daughter Eva Zulema. — AFP/UNB photo

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Jihad hails attempt on Mubarak

CAIRO, July 9: The Egyptian militant group Jihad praised the country's other main Islamist cell, the Jamaa Islamiyya, for trying to kill President Hosni Mubarak, the Arab daily Al-Hayat reported today, reports AFP.

"It was the warriors of the Jamaa that executed this attack," Jihad said in a statement titled "the strugglers", received by the London-based paper, which is distributed in Cairo.

"Let the world witness that sons of Egypt committed this holy act," the statement said.

Al-Hayat said the statement originated in Switzerland, where the group's leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri is reported to be in hiding.

In a fax last week, the Jamaa claimed responsibility for the failed assassination attempt against Mubarak in Addis Ababa on June 26, which Egypt has accused Sudan's Islamist government of supporting.

The Jamaa and Jihad, which has behind the 1981 assassination of President Anwar Al-Sadat, have led a violent three-year campaign to overthrow the Mubarak government which has left more than 800 dead since March 1992.

"We don't know for sure where the peacekeepers area," it was not immediately known if the peacekeepers had resisted the Serb attacks.

Coward said another Dutch UN observation post in the western part of the enclave came under heavy machine-gun fire from Serb forces around midnight, and its watchtower was damaged. Fighting decreased slightly overnight.

NATO warplanes were called in to buzz Srebrenica briefly during Saturday's fighting, but no airstrikes were requested.

Islamic punishments, while legal in Pakistan, are only carried out in semi-autonomous tribal areas in the northwest.

Demirel for end of animosity with Greece

ANKARA, July 9: President Suleyman Demirel has called on Greece to put aside animosity and solve conflicts peacefully, it was reported on Sunday, reports AP.

Demirel told the national daily Hurriyet in an interview that the Greeks engaged in provocations against Turkey because of a Turkish complex.

"If you provoke us, then you will create troubles for yourself," Demirel said, obviously referring to Greek authorities.

He appeared to be referring to the recent meeting of six Greek parliamentarians with the fugitive Turkish Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

A visit by the head of the Turkish Kurdish parliament-in-exile to Athens further upset Turkey.

Off the Record

He knows the secret
LONDON: An Italian chemist thinks he knows what makes "miraculous" statues of the Virgin Mary appear to weep blood, reports Reuter.

Dr Luigi Garlaschelli said three ingredients were needed for weeping statues that have often attracted the Roman Catholic faithful — blood, a glazed ceramic or plaster statue and something sharp like a nail.

The research chemist said the blood can be poured into the hollow body of a porous statue which then soaks it up. "Scratch off a tiny part of the glazing and the blood oozes out," he said.

"When I put this to the test, this proved very satisfactory, baffling all onlookers," Garlaschelli wrote in the latest issue of Chemistry in Britain.

Kieran Conry, of the Catholic media office, welcomed his findings, telling the Sunday Telegraph: "If God wanted to say something to us, there are more direct ways of doing it. The more research there is the better."

Lucky boy!
FAYETTEVILLE, North Carolina: A ten-year-old boy who spent 10 dollars at a commercial gem mine for a bucket of soil found a 1,061-carat sapphire that experts say is worth thousands, reports AP.

Lawrence Shields found the large bluish-black stone Wednesday while picking through the dirt at the Gold City gem mine near Franklin in southwestern North Carolina.

Lawrence's father, Larry Shields, said he hopes the stone will help pay for his son's college education, but the boy had his sights fixed on other options.

"I've decided to buy a fishing boat," he said. "The name is going to be Sapphire."

Experts said the true value of the stone cannot be determined until it is cut and polished, but the family has had some rough estimates ranging over 35,000 dollars.

Black, white and sexy
PARIS: All black and white? That's how two Italians saw it in early openings of the winter 95-96 haute couture shows Saturday, reports AP.

Maurizio Galante went all-out for black and intricate craftsmanship, as Gianni Versace showed off his white, razzle-dazzle and glitz.

Always with stars in his eyes (mainly movie stars), Versace showed again on a catwalk from the Ritz Hotel's swimming pool.

Supermodels paraded in his high-tech, tight, sexy clothes — all-white, sizzling silver and sometimes partially transparent.

Claudia Schiffer, Naomi Campbell, Helena Christensen and Carla Bruni swanned down the runway, rather modestly enjoying their clothes with a heavy salt to the Sixties.

In fact, with the square-cut mini suits, zips all over the place, silver booties, boots or pumps, it all looked strangely like a homage to Courreges, who invented this clean look, to Mugler who loves fit and zips, and Montana who's done it all before, especially in white.

For women who like to lunch in style — for a high price, since couture always costs around 10,000 dls or so for a simple dress — there are sleeveless dresses in wool gabardine and little shortie suits with miniskirts. Or strapless numbers with coy jackets and sheaths fit to kill, of several lengths but never quite below the knee.

And of course this all goes right on to cocktails and the disco, in zipped white sheaths held up by clear plastic vinyl yokes, dresses and suits with pearls, scooped necks, stretch synthetic silvery mother-of-pearl or all-sequined outfits for the perfectly fit body — sexy but not outrageous siren, like some of Versace's revealing recent collections.

France to bar Greenpeace from reaching N-test site
MURUROA, French Polynesia, July 9: French navy commandos were in place Saturday to intercept any attempt by the Greenpeace flagship Rainbow Warrior II to reach the French nuclear test site in the Pacific, reports AFP.

Rainbow Warrior and a sister vessel got within 50 kilometers (30 miles) of Mururoa Atoll still tailed by the French navy frigate, Vendemiaire. Other French vessels were waiting for Greenpeace at the edge of the military exclusion zone France has declared 12 nautical miles (20 km) around the atoll.

Russia plans to liberalise policy to boost arms sales

MOSCOW, July 9: Russia is planning to allow major weapons manufacturers to sign deals independently over the coming months in a bid to boost arms sales, industry experts said here, reports AFP.

Currently the state-owned agency Rosvooruzheniye and Mig-Mapo, which manufactures the Mig-29 jet fighter, have the right to sign contracts with foreign clients.

But Alexander Ageyev, head of strategy planning at the giant Mig-Mapo Aircraft Company, told AFP that more than 10 other arms manufacturers would soon get the green light from the government to make their own deals.

Yeltsin's adviser on arms trade, told reporters recently that Antel, which makes anti-aircraft systems, would be the first company to receive the right to sign contracts.

There are only a few companies with real export potential," he said. Arms sales in the first half of 1995 increased to 1.5 billion dollars, compared with 1.7 billion for the whole of 1994, said Kuzzyk. The total for this year was expected to exceed 2.5 billion.

Russia is planning to export up to 200 military aircraft annually. Ageyev said Mig-Mapo was developing into a powerful multinational company. It already has a flourishing business with around 400 other Russian arms enterprises.

The company is currently assembling 10 Mig-29s to Malaysia in early June.

The company is currently assembling 10 Mig-29s for India, Ageyev said, adding that Mig-Mapo's profits from arms sales last year totalled 1.5 billion dollars.

According to the Daily Izvestiya, the contract with India signed in January is worth more than 200 million dollars.

KSA, Oman to sign new maps today

MUSCAT, July 9: Oman and Saudi Arabia finished marking their common border after a 1,350-day study and are expected to sign the new maps on Monday, an Omani official said Saturday, reports AFP.

The two Gulf countries are to sign in Riyadh 600 maps fixing their 657 kilometer (407-mile) border, which passes through part of the Rubaa al-Khali Desert, one of the driest in the world.

These maps will be sent to the United Nations, Arab League and the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Oman's Deputy Agriculture Minister, Soltan Ibn Hamad al-Bussaidi, told AFP.