

The Space Shuttle Discovery lifts off Thursday from Kennedy Space Centre's launch pad 39-B. The Discovery, with a five-person crew, begins a planned eight-day mission to place a Tracking and Data Relay satellite in orbit while conducting science and - AFP/UNB photo astronomy projects. 3 Romanians held in Budapest:

Three Romanian nationals hidden in a truck of furniture bound for Sweden were found by customs authorities and arrested in Budapest Thursday, authorities said, AFP report from Budapest. The authorities found the Romanians when the truck was opened in

Budapest in order to load more merchandise, they said.

7 cops shot dead in Tripura: Tribal guerillas shot and killed seven policemen and a civilian in an ambush in the northeastern Indian state of Tripura, the Press Trust of India (PII) reported Friday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Seven other policemen were injured in the attack late Thursday at Dhalai region by the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), which is fighting to secede the tiny state from India, the news agency said.

Hamas leader jailed: An Israeli military court sentenced a leader of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) to six months in jail on Thursday for inciting violence, AFP reports from tamallah, West Bank.

Sheikh Jamil Hamami, a senior political figure with the hardline fundanentalists, also received a nine-month suspended sentence in the occupied West Bank town of Ramallah.

Violence claims 80 in S Africa : Nearly 80 people have died in political, factional and criminal violence in South Africa's Zulu heartland of Kwazulu-Natal during the past week, police said on Thursday, Reuter reports from Durban, South Africa.

Heat wave kills 10 in US: A heat wave that scorched the Plains for a sixth straight day Thursday has claimed at least 10 lives, derailed a freight train with rail-warping temperatures of 112 degrees Fahrenheit (44 degrees Celsius) and felled cattle, leaving them rotting - even bursting — in their pens, AP reports from New York.

The system was moving eastward and it was expected to stay the weekend over the eastern half of the nation.

Seoul city mayor apologises: seoul City Mayor Chosoon Friday publicly apologised over the mistake in the count of those missing in a department store collapse in Seoul pointing a finger at old habits and bureaucracy, AFP reports from Seoul.

Meanwhile, the confirmed death toll from the Sampong department store collapse rose to 266 after rescuers sifting through the rubble dug out five more bodies overnight and early Friday.

Floods kill 10 in Western Turkey: Flood waters caused by heavy rain swept away seven people in this southern town on Friday, increasing the local death toll to at least 10, Governor Ertugrul Dokuzoglu said on Friday, Ap reports from Turkey.

The flood washed mud and rocks from a nearby mountain into the town, burying 200 houses under water as deep as 2 meters (more than 6 feet). The death toll could rise as the rescue teams clear the disaster area, Dokuzoglu said. Around the country, 14 have died in the past week in the worst flooding in 62 years.

Kurdish rebels kidnap Japanese: Kurdish rebels on Friday kidnapped a Japanese tourist in southeastern Turkey, the Anatolia news agency reported, says AP.

The rebels blocked a main road between the southeastern provinces of Siirt and Bitlis near the town of Baykan after midnight, forcing a passenger bus to come to a stop, the dispatch said.

While the rebels were collecting money from the passengers for their cause, soldier arrived, but the rebels took off, taking with them a Japanese passenger, the Anatolia added. A Japanese diplomat said the embassy was not aware of the abduction.

Blasts kill 6 in China: Two blasts in two days in an east coast Chinese city have killed six people and injured 13, according to an official report seen in Beijing on Friday, AP reports from

On Sunday, an explosion in a chemical factory one woman worker. The blast started a fire in which 13 other workers were burned, eight of them seriously, Shanghai's Xinmin Evening News reported in its Thursday editions. The next day, a blast in a warehouse leveled a two-story building and killed five people. Rescue workers unearthed a two-year-old child after seven hours of efforts. He was unhurt, the paper said.

US blames Tigers for violence

# BRIEFLY LTTE launches counter-attack, downs air force jet

COLOMBO, July 14: Tamil rebels killed at least 50 soldiers in their first counter-attack on Sri Lankan armed forces today as they pierced forward defence lines and shot down an air force plane, the military said, reports

Security forces were engaged in heavy "hand-to-hand combat" in territory they captured earlier this week from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the northern Jaffna Peninsula, a military spokesman said.

"We must have lost at least 50 soldiers and they also must have suffered heavy casualties. Although we have no firm figures," he said. The fighting was in an area cap-

tured by troops from the LTTE during "Operation Leap Forward" launched on Sunday. The military said in a statement that the LTTE, fighting for their own homeland in the north and east, at-

tacked the new defence lines at Sandilipay and Alaveddi. "Fighting still continues and

hence casualty figures cannot be released at present," the statement

Early today the rebels shot down an air force Pucara ground attack aircraft, killing the pilot, the military

"A two-seater fighter ground aircraft ... which flew in to support the ground troops was shot down by a suspected missile," it said.

The plane crashed within the defended area and the remains of the pilot and the plane were recovered. In April, the rebels shot down two ageing British-made AVRO transport planes with missiles, killing more than

The Tigers also attacked a police post near Eravur in Batticaloa district in the eastern part of the country this morning, killing six policemen and wounding several, the spokesman

The previous evening, six soldiers, including an officer, were killed when a pressure mine exploded under

a vehicle carrying troops in the north. the spokesman said. Four soldiers were wounded.

Relief workers and church officials say atleast 150 civilians have been killed and hundreds wounded in bombing and shelling.

The bishop of the Jaffna diocese of the Church of South India today called for an immediate halt to fighting in the rebel-held northern peninsula where he said hundreds of thousands of Tamils were fleeing shelling and bombing raids.

Bishop Subramaniam Jevanesan said that if any government peace package were to work in the north, the people must be allowed to return to their homes.

AFP adds from Washington: Tamil separatists are most to blame for the violence in Sri Lanka, where government forces have launched an offensive to crush the rebellion, a State Department spokesman said Thursday.

"The Sri Lankan government

faces terrible challenges from the Tamil Tigers, and the Tamil Tigers have been responsible for the most repugnant atrocities over the past couple of weeks and months," State Department spokesman Nicholas

"We condemn the acts of terrorism by that particular group, and hope that the government of Sri Lanka will be able to contain this violence," he said.

The spokesman refused to condemn the bombing of a Roman Catholic church Sunday by the Sri Lankan air force in the northern Jaffna Peninsula. Sixty people were killed in the bombing.

"We know that the Sri Lankan government is looking into that particular incident in which its own forces may have been involved," he

"We condemn the death of the people, but we know that the Sri Lankan government is looking into that incident," he said.

Clinton okays

closure of 105

military bases

WASHINGTON, July 14: Presi

The commission's recommenda-

Infuriated, Clinton heatedly ac-

The commission's list included 79

Mann repeats

demand for Sikh

homeland

tained Akali leader, Simranjeet Singh

Mann, has strongly reiterated his

commitment to party's discarded po-

litical aim of the "Amritsar Declara-

tion", demanding separate secular

state for Sikhs in India, reports PTL.

trict courts here where he was brought

from Patiala for judicial remain in a

case under TADA yesterday, Mann

expressed anguish over discarding of

the Amritsar Declaration by leaders

like Akali Dal president Prakash Singh

Badal and said he would not accept

any post in the party till this aim was

not happy with the role of the acting

head priest of Akal Takht, Prof Man-

stood on declaration which was a de-

cision of the supreme Sikh seat of

Akal Takht, Mann added.

In this respect, he said, he was

The acting head priest had not

Talking to newspapers in the dis-

AMRITSAR, July 14: Senior de-

### India must meet demands by today says kidnappers

SRINAGAR, July 14: Separatist militants holding five Western hostages in Kashmir urged the captives' friends and families on Friday to win their release by persuading India to free 21 jailed rebels, reports

In a telephone call to The Associated Press, the little-known Al-Faran Muslim rebel group threatened once again to kill the five male hostages by Saturday evening if their demand is not met.

The call was believed to be genuine because the unidentified Al-Faran spokesman used a pre-arranged

Wives or girlfriends of four of the five hostages held a news conference in Srinagar on Thursday, urging the captives to free the hostages : an American, two Britons, a German and a Norwegian.

'We assure the ladies that the hostages are in good health," the milltant spokesman said Friday. "Tell the ladies to press the government to release the jailed militants we have

He also said the rebels telephoned Indian officials in Kashmir on Thursday and they refused to speak to the guerillas.

But Western diplomats and

rights group joined the state's Muslim religious and political leaders by urging Al-Faran to release the captives immediately The hostages are : Donald

Indian officials said Friday they have

been trying to contact the rebels for

days, but so far have been unable to

to somehow reach the kidnappers, but it appears they don't want to talk to the government directly," said the

senior Indian official who is coordi-

nating the efforts to free the

touch with them and vie for some

more time," said the official, who

the United States, Britain, Germany

and Norway have traveled to Srinagar,

the summer capital of Jammu-

Kashmir state, to consult with the

the Amnesty International human

In another development Friday,

"Our first priority is to get in

New Delhi-based diplomats from

"We are making a last ditch effort

reach them.

hostages.

cannot be named.

Indian officials.

Hutchings, 42, of Spokane, Washington; Keith Mangan, 33, of Middlesbrough, England; Paul Wells, 23, of London; Dirk Hasert, 26, of Erfurt, Germany; and Hans Christian Ostro, 27, of Oslo, Norway,

## Off the Record

#### Marijuana-eating cow!

BRASILIA, Brazil, A Brazilian cow and three heifers died of drug overdoses from eating 88 pounds (40 kilograms) of marijuana, a newspaper reported on Thursday, says Reuter.

The capital's Correio Braziliense daily said foreman Paulo Sergio Goulart found bricks of plastic-wrapped marijuana hidden in a farm pen near the southern city of Porto Alegre. He thought they were a strong-smelling alfalfa and fed them to the ani-

mals, scrapping and all. The cow and heifers died on Saturday and a polices drug unit and a vet-

erinarian confirmed the cause of death was marijuana overdoses. "It was good that the cow wasn't giving milk. Just think, if you had drunk it you would end up stoned," Goulart said.

#### He took three and a half years to learn the shocking truth! BOUNTIFUL UTAH, July 14: Only after police arrested his wife for

credit card fraud did Bruce Jensen learn the shocking truth his wife of three and a half years is a man, reports AFP. I feel pretty stupid Jensen, 39, said in an interview with the standard examiner of Ogden Utah.

His "wife," Felix Urioste, 34, was jailed for bilking Jensen out of 40,000 dollars by fraudulantly obtaining credit cards in his name. Police calling Jensen incredibly naive, said Urioste was able to pull off the sham because Jensen never saw him naked and because he looked like a woman. Urioste reportedly faked pregnancy after one sexual encounter, leading to the couple's marriage.

After that authorities said, the couple essentially remained celibate. Asked what he would do once the fraud case against Urioste is over Jensen told the newspaper he would crawl in a hole for a few years and not let anyone within rifle range.

#### World's oldest footprints

PERTH, Australia: Scientists say they have found fossilised footprints, believed to be the oldest in the world, that prove giant sea creatures began living on land 30 million years earlier than previously thought, reports AP.

Scientists from the West Australian Museum found the footprints of eight creatures, including those resembling a six-foot (two-meter) long poisonous scorpion, a five-foot (1.5 meter) centipede and a six-inch (15 cm) cockroach, at Kalbarri, 365 miles (590 km) north of Perth last week.

Paleontologist Ken McNamara said Thursday the find was significant because if shattered the widely held view that the first creatures to evolve from the sea were herbivores.

McNamara said the tracks found last week belonged to creatures that roamed the earth about 430 million years ago, long before the known existence of plants. This indicates the creatures were carnivores that survived by eating each other, he said.

The previous earliest known existence of terrestrial creatures, such as mites and small centipedes, was in England about 400 million years ago. McNamara said three of the types of footprints found last week had been identified as eurypterids, euthycarinoids and arthropleurids, which were creatures that lived in the sea about 430 million years ago.

The tracks of up to five other creatures had also been found near a river. six miles (10 km) from the coast, but it was not yet known what type of creatures made them.

#### Gingrich wants UN confce venue moved from China

WASHINGTON, July 14: House leader Newt Gingrich says the United States should try to move the United Nations Conference on Women out of Beijing in protest of human rights violations in China, reports AP.

He also warned that the House might cancel funding for the US delegation, which Hillary Rodham Clinton has been asked to lead. In the Senate, a conservative and

a liberal senator issued a joint letter saying China should lose its favourable trading status.

In an interview with The Washington Times, Gingrich cited the newspaper's report that State Department officials warned women planning to attend the convention that the United States could not planning to attend the convention that the United States could not guarantee their safety and that they should not risk bringing Bibles into the Communist country.

#### Suu Kyi bears no ill-will towards military junta own. Of course, I missed my family LONDON, July 14: Myanmar op-

position leader Aung San Suu Kyi said in an interview published today that she bore no ill-will towards the military regime that held her under house arrest for six years, reports AFP. Speaking to The Daily Telegraph

following the lifting of the restrictions this week, she said "I truly feel no ill-will towards my captors. This is not just something I'm saying to be tactful or diplomatic. I myself sometimes wonder why that is." She said she had concluded it was

partly because she associated the Myanmar army with her father Aung San, who secured Myanmar's independence from Britain.

"Most of my photos show my father in uniform so I grew up thanking of the army as part of the family."

quite tolerable.

Aung San Suu Kyi also said the conditions of her detention were

"I have to confess that I really did not find it very difficult to be on my people suffering much more than She said she always rose early and began her day with an hour of meditation, it was partly a matter of self

and my colleagues, but I tried not to

think about that I knew there were

tate that early when it is still very, very quiet. "Paradoxically I know it sounds funny but often I would find I did not

discipline but it is also good to medi-

have enough time for everything." She said "she ate regularly, but

never very much, the thing about being alone is that you do lose your interest in food. Cooking for myself was no fun at all. Aung San Suu Kvi added, I look

upon these past six years as having been a chance to experience a kind of life that not many people have, at the end of it she felt "not different but stronger and better."

#### Iran calls for emergency OIC meet over Bosnia

ABU DHABI (UAE), July 14: Iran has called for an emergency meeting of the OIC contact group to deal with the deteriorating plight of hunanity in Bosnia-Herzegovina and has offered to host such a meeting, reports IRNA.

This was conveyed in a message from Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati to secretary general of the Orisations of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Hamid Al-Gabid, by Iran's deputy representative to the organisation to the organisation Asghar Manousi in Jeddah yesterday. "The critical condition of Bosnia-

Herzegovina has been worsened by the Serb attacks especially on the region declared as safe haven by the United Nations and has led to further oppression and massacre of defenceless Muslims of the area," said Velayati's message.

#### GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, July 14: Yasser Arafat's Islamic militant rivals, on the defensive as Israeli and PLO peacemakers forge ahead, are signaling that they are ready to abandon violence and instead challenge the

Israeli military officials concur that the Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups, whose deadly suicide bombings in Israel played havoc with the peace talks, have temporarily laid down their arms.

PLO chief in the political arena, re-

However, one official cautioned Thursday, "it is always possible for some insane splinter group to arise that no one has control over."

The change in tactics emerged gradually in recent weeks, and appears to stem from Arafat's crackdown on militants following an April 9 suicide bombing that killed seven Israelis and an American tourist.

talking openly about the need to prepare for participation in Palestinian general elections that are to be held this fall. Until recently, Hamas leaders said they would boycott the balloting, arguing that if they ran for office it implied acceptance of the Israel-PLO autonomy accord.

Some Hamas leaders have begun

But there have been reports in the last three months that Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been talking with Arafat's Palestinian Authority.

"We repeatedly told the Palestinian authority that we want to freeze the military activities. We want to form a political party," Ghazi Hamad, editor of the Hamas movement's Al-Watan newspaper, told The

Associated Press Thursday. Hamas has decided it "wants to work together with the Palestinian Authority in creating the Palestinian state," added Emad Falouji, a Hamas

A top Israeli military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there have been fewer attacks and attempts by both Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Some Israelis fear, however, that the less violent approach may be only temporary.

. A leaflet sent recently to news agencies by Hamas' armed wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, admitted as much. It said the group "decided to decrease temporarily all military operations" in order to "give the Palestinian Authority a chance to restore the West Bank (to Palestinian control)."

Analysts say the militants made the switch after they realised that the peace negotiations would go ahead despite their violent campaign to scuttle peace moves. Violence has killed 124 Israelis since the

Extremists ready to give up arms to face Arafat politically September 1993 signing of the first Israel-PLO accord.

> Now that a second agreement appears imminent on expanding autonomy from Gaza to the West Bank, the militants apparently fell they have more to gain by challenging Arafat in elections than in the street.

> It is not clear whether the move away from violence means the militants have given up opposition to peacemaking, although the new approach does suggest a strengthening of elements that might be willing to accept an accommodation with

"Hamas understands that there is a workable agreement, that there is a strong (Palestinian) authority. All Hamas has done against the agreement did not (stop) the peace process," said Ziad Amr, a political analyst at the West Bank's Bir Zeit University.

Facing the prospect of competing for votes, the fundamentalists have become more attuned to Palestinian frustration with attacks that have brought painful Israeli countermeasures, such as the closer of the West Bank and Gaza. The travel bans have kept tens of thousands of Palestinians from jobs in

Israel. "People started blaming Hamas for their bad economic conditions," Amr said

After the April 9 suicide bombing, Israel gave Arafat an ultimatum either to crack down on the militants or forget about taking control in the West Bank. He has since arrested more than one hundred leading activists and has also established secret military tribunals that tried and sentenced more than a dozen militants.

Arafat has not fully enforced a ban on unauthoried weapons, but PLO police have limited the opposition groups' proselytizing in mosques their most effective political stomp-

The Israeli military source attributed the militants' moderation to Arafat's "firm hand."

The source said that the groups' leadership may not fully control every guerrilla with a gun or knife. However, the apparent decision to stop attacks could prevent the bombings that have wreaked the most damage

and eroded support in Israel for the peace talks. PLO leaders acknowledge that their crackdown resulted from Israel's insistence that it would implement the autonomy agreements only after the violence ceased.

"We have wasted a year," said Hisham Abdel-Razek, a top PLO official in Gaza. "We cannot tolerate this policy of terror attacks, any more. Enough is enough."

#### 1 lakh Sudanese troops stand-by to defend Halaib' KHARTOUM, July 14: Sudanese

head of state Lieutenant General Omar Al-Beshir said more than 100,000 troops were standing by to defend Halaib, a region on the Red Sea to which Egypt has laid claim, reports AFP. He said the troops had graduated

Thursday from the Popular Defence Force Camps in eastern Sudan state and were ready to defend the nation against "colonialist aggression". Addressing a rally in Red Sea state in the east of the country, Beshir said

Egypt had cut off the water supplies to civilians in the Halaib area in a mean and futile move to subjugate the citizens of Halaib".

"A message for those who kneel before the Americans and the Zionists. Sudan will never be frightened by the provocations," he said.



Japan's ruling coalition splits

#### over defence spending TOKYO, July 14: Japan's right-left ruling coalition headed by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama was deeply split today over whether the

country should put a tight lid on growth in its defence spending, reports Reuter. The schism emerged after Murayama's Socialist Party proposed on Thursday that Japan should keep defence budget growth below 0.855

per cent in the next fiscal year beginning in April 1996. Japan's military spending got a mere 9.855 per cent boost in the current fiscal year - the smallest rate of

growth since 1960-61 - to 4.72 trillion yen (54.2 billion dollars). "We can't restrain spending growth to below 0.855 per cent,' Koichi Kato, who heads the Policy Affairs Council in the Conservative

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), said

today. "We must have a full discussion with the Socialist Party." However, Socialist leaders includ-

ing Murayama showed no signs of

making concessions to the LDP, the senior coalition partner. "Our arms reduction policy has been fixed," Murayama told re-

The three coalition parties - the Yeltsin phones PM

from sick bed MOSCOW, July 14: Russian President Boris Yeltsin on Thursday had: telephone conversation from his hospital bed with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin in which they discussed Chechnya and the political

and economic situation, reports AFP.

Tuesday with a heart ailment.

Yeltsin has been in hospital since

last year to keep defence budget growth down to 0.9 per cent. Last year Murayama scrapped his Socialist Party's long-held opposition to the existence of the self-defence forces (military) in order to shore up

Socialists, their cold war foes the LDP

and the Sakigake Party - agreed when

they formed their government in June

relations with the LDP. Japan has not reduced defence spending year-on-year since the birth of the country's military after the 1950-53 Korean War. Its defence spending currently

the Defence Ministry says more than half of total outlay goes on wages and other non-equipment expenses. The squabble broke out just as the unwidely coalition needs to show

unity for July 23 upper house of par-

liament elections.

ranks among the world's highest, but

Dutch UN soldiers carry the coffin of 25-year-old Dutch UN soldier Raviv Van Renssen, Thursday in Loenen, the Netherlands, during his funeral at the war cemetery. Hundreds of people attended the funeral of Van Renssen who was killed July 8 outside the Dutch UN observation post Foxtrot in Srebrenica. — AFP/UNB photo