

BRIEFLY

Moscow frees Dudayev's aide: The Moscow representative of Chechen separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev, Khamat Kurbanov, arrested following the Budennovsk hostage crisis, was released Monday...

Women's anti-riot rally in Iran: Thousands of Iranian women have for the first time taken part in anti-riot exercises, in a northwestern province, newspapers reported in Tehran Monday...

Violence claims 23 in S Africa: At least 23 people were killed in criminal and political violence over the weekend in South Africa's Kwazulu-Natal province, the police said Monday...

Refugee camp gutted in Sri Lanka: Nearly all the 200 huts at a refugee camp for the minority Tamils were destroyed in a fire in northwestern Sri Lanka, police said Tuesday...

Sweden to send aid for Bosnian: The Swedish government decided Monday to contribute catastrophe aid to refugees in Bosnia in the form of material, personnel and transportation...

Pilot dies in Indonesian jet crash: A twin Otter aircraft operated by Indonesia's domestic Merpati Nusantara Airlines crashed on take-off in Irian Jaya province of Indonesia on Monday, killing its pilot and injuring 16 others...

Rabin reshuffles cabinet: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin reshuffled his cabinet yesterday appointing former military chief of staff Ehud Barak as interior minister and Yossi Beilin as economy minister...



UN High Commissioner for Refugees Japanese Sadako Ogata (R) observes a four-month-old Samira Buljubasic being cared for at the Tuzla refugee camp on Monday...

Japan, China to talk on N-arms

TOKYO, July 18: More than two months after Japan said it would reduce aid to China because of a nuclear test, representatives of the two countries will meet in Beijing to discuss nuclear issues...

Traffic-related pollution choking Asia's major cities

HONG KONG, July 18: Air pollution caused by traffic congestion is beginning to choke Asia's major cities, and shortsightedness, entrenched interest and even respect for authority are to blame...

Fall of Zepa imminent amid Serb artillery attack

SARAJEVO, July 18: Bosnian Serbs encroaching on the enclave of Zepa launched a fierce artillery and mortar attack on the town itself Tuesday...

Fearing that Zepa could fall, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic on Monday proposed talks with enemy Serbs on the evacuation of elderly and wounded civilians...

A Serb leader, Mocolo Krajinik, said Tuesday the government proposal should have come earlier, "to avoid conflicts."

Even as Krajinik issued his statement, Serbs were shelling Zepa town, the heart of the enclave, with fierce intensity. But there were no reports of troop movements...

Serbs have broken through the edge of the enclave and advanced to within a kilometre (mile) of the town. After a strong attack reported by the United Nations on Sunday...

The attack on Zepa, which began Friday, followed the fall of another UN-designated "safe area," Srebrenica, to the Serbs last week. Tens of thousands of Muslim civilians were deported.

Zepa, a remote area about 50 kilometres (30 miles) from Sarajevo, is home to between 10,000 and 16,000 people.

The government proposal to talk with the rebels appeared designed to avert a repeat of the atrocities said to have been committed by Serbs after they seized Srebrenica...

The Bosnian president met twice with the UN commander for Bosnia, Gen. Rupert Smith, to discuss

evacuation plans. The top UN official in former Yugoslavia, Yasushi Akashi, said today that if the Bosnian government requested assistance, the United Nations would do "whatever it can to facilitate their wishes."

Bosnian Serb television predicted it would take a week for the town to fall. Izetbegovic's offer for negotiations with the rebels indicated the government was losing hope of defending the enclave.

Information from the area is sketchy. Government ham radio operators have difficulty maintaining contact even with Sarajevo, radio operators in the capital have said.

The United Nations has admitted it is powerless to defend its "safe area." There are just 79 Ukrainian peacekeepers in Zepa, many of them disarmed by government defenders trying to augment their own arsenal.

UN officials have indicated there is little prospect of NATO airstrikes to deter the

Serb onslaught. Western governments have been unable to reach consensus about their strategy following Srebrenica's fall, the United Nations' greatest humiliation in more than three years of war in Bosnia.

AFP adds from Paris, alarm is increasing in Arab and other Muslim countries over the situation in Bosnia, where Serb rebels are overrunning UN-declared "safe areas" and expelling their Muslim inhabitants in "ethnic cleansing" accompanied by alleged atrocities.

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia said after a weekly cabinet meeting that he would be calling on the United Nations to face up to its responsibilities against "savage Serb aggression."

King Hussein of Jordan also called on UN troops to intervene strongly against the Serb.



An Iraqi boy holds a picture of President Saddam Hussein Monday as hundreds of people demonstrate, shouting anti-US slogans, to demand the lifting of UN economic sanctions...

14 get death sentence for bid to topple Nigerian junta

LAGOS, July 18: General Shehu Musa Yar'adua, number two in former President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, and 13 other members of the military have been sentenced to death after convictions for trying to topple Nigeria's military government...

There was no official confirmation of the reports. A special military court sent General Obasanjo and 10 other civilians and members of the military to prison for life...

Other defendants reportedly received jail sentences of between two and 25 years. Obasanjo, 60, was the only African military ruler to have relinquished power voluntarily...

Yar'adua was one of the candidates for a restored civilian presidency in the 1993 election which the military administration at that time cancelled.

There is no right of appeal over the military tribunal's decision.

Prominent opposition lawyer Gani Fawehinmi told AFP that any appeal to the provisional Ruling Council (PRC), the country's supreme authority, was "simply a time-wasting exercise."

The PRC is not a court, the decisions of the commander of chief of the armed forces who presides it cannot be queried under the command structure of the military and the PRC does not have the legitimacy of an appeal court, he added.

If the sentences on the convicts are carried out, the consequences will be very devastating to the country.

SC summons Rao for non-payment of travel bills

NEW DELHI, July 18: India's Supreme Court on Monday called Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao for non-payment of personal travel bills owed to the Defence Ministry and asked the government to investigate...

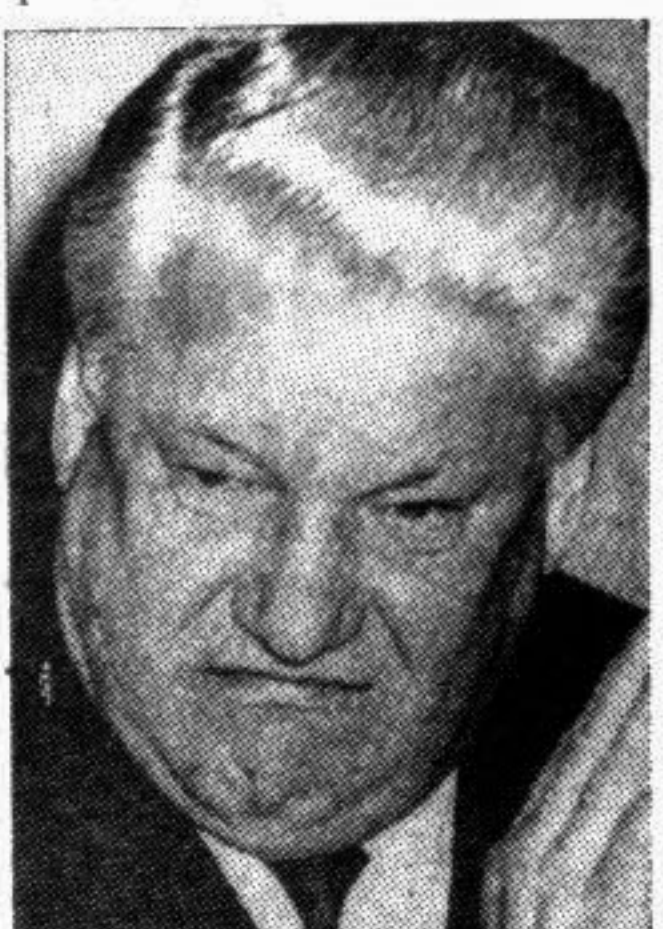
The Court, after hearing a petition filed by a citizen, gave the solicitor general two weeks to find out whether the money owed to the Defence Ministry had been paid.

Rao ran up a bill of 829 million rupees (26.7 million dollars) during October-November 1993, a period of state elections, by using aircraft and helicopters of the Indian Air Force for personal travel across the country.

The citizen claimed in his petition he had written to Rao last year requesting him to pay the money and had decided to petition the Court after failing to hear from the prime minister.

That was an old photograph of Yeltsin

MOSCOW, July 18: An official photograph supposedly showing Boris Yeltsin in the hospital last week was actually months old, raising new questions about Kremlin manipulation...



Manipulation and the real state of the Russian president's health, reports AP.

The official Russian news agency ITAR-Tass released a photo last Friday that it said had been taken from Yeltsin's room at Moscow's Central Clinical Hospital, where he was admitted on July 11 for heart pain.

Video obtained by Associated Press Television on Tuesday, however, showed the exact same scene, with Yeltsin wearing the same tennis shirt, in front of the same drapes with a bank of four telephones at his left elbow. He sat in front of documents with a pen on the desk.

A Yeltsin spokesman flatly denied that the photo was old. NBC News on Monday carried the initial report on the striking similarity between the images.

Off the Record

Joke turned out deadly

JERUSALEM: Nine Israeli soldiers were wounded when a colleague threw an antitank grenade at them apparently as a joke and it exploded, military sources said Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Two were moderately wounded, the others lightly, in the incident on Monday. The sources said a soldier found the grenade during an exercise near the town of Yeroham and jokingly threw it at a group of soldiers.

The soldiers were taken to hospital. Israel's military chief, Lieutenant-General Amnon Shahak, suspended ground corps training while investigating the incident.

Rarest spy camera to fetch \$55,000

LONDON: One of the rarest spy cameras ever made — it is hidden inside a revolver — is to be put up for sale in London, the auctioneers Christie's said on Monday, reports Reuter.

They believe the camera, made by a French inventor known as Monsieur Enjalbert and patented in 1882, could fetch up to 35,000 pounds (55,000 dollars) at the August 31 sale.

"It is an extremely rare camera and, as far as we are aware, this is the first example ever to be sold at auction," specialist Michael Pritchard said of the camera, which holds 10 square film plates that are exposed when you pull the trigger.

Patriotic model supporter of army

BEIJING: A present woman who loves the military so much she sent four of her sons into the armed services is China's latest official hero, reports AP.

A patriotic model supporter of the army was the title given Monday to Yao Cixian by the government and military. On Tuesday, her sense of sacrifice and duty were praised on the front pages of the Communist Party's People's Daily and other leading newspapers.

"In the future, you'll have many opportunities to make money," she was quoted as telling her third son. "But the opportunity to become a soldier and serve the country comes but once in a person's life."

Yao fits the bill in many ways. She is from the heartland of China's current craze to get rich, southeastern Guangdong province. In such prosperous areas, families tend to send their sons out to make money rather than into the military.

Bucking the trend, Yao has one son each in the army, navy, air force and armed police.

Improved Sino-US ties hinge on Christopher, Qian talks

BEIJING, July 18: China said Thursday that improved US-China relations hinge on talks between US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and his Chinese counterpart, Qian Qichen, reports AP.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qian has agreed to meet Christopher August 1 in Brunei, during the annual meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Relations are at their worst in years, strained over a variety of issues, including US relations with Taiwan, arms sales and the arrest of a Chinese-American human rights activist.

"Whether there will be a turning point is to be decided by the meetings between the two foreign ministers in Brunei," Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang said at a weekly briefing. "It all hinges upon the results of the talks."

Shen declined to say what

was on the agenda, but reiterated China's position that it expects the United States to take concrete measures toward restoring good relations.

He did not specify what measures were expected, but Qian said last week that China wants the United States to apologise for granting Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui a visa and promise not to do it again.

China considers the US visa for Lee a violation of the US-China communication that are the foundation of bilateral relations, and Shen warned that if the United States continues to violate them, "I believe that US-China relations will certainly continue to deteriorate."

Shen also categorically denied that China has sold missile components or chemical weapons technology to Iran in violation of international agreements.

China to keep up 'good relations' with India: Li

BEIJING, July 18: Chinese Premier Li Peng told visiting Indian Home Affairs Minister Shankarrao Chavan on Monday that China wants to keep up "good relations" with India as with all its neighbours, Xinhua news agency said, reports AP.

"China hopes to make progress in bilateral relations with India in various fields on the basis of peaceful co-existence," Li told Chavan, in a meeting.

Xinhua said Chavan was in China to learn how the country was dealing with "its various social problems while advancing the socialist market economy."