

BRIEFLY

Floods claim 16 more in Nepal: Flash floods and landslides triggered by incessant rain in western Nepal have left 16 people dead in the last three days, bringing the death toll from flooding this season to 139, the state-run news agency RSS said yesterday. AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The Nepal Red Cross Society and local relief committees in the affected district of Syangja are providing aid to flood victims, it said.

2 trampled to death in Israel: A 17-year-old boy and a young girl were trampled to death and 109 people hurt in a stampede at a rock festival late Tuesday in southern Israel, police said yesterday. AFP reports from Israel.

Three teenaged girls were critically ill in a coma and six other people were kept in hospital, but were out of danger, doctors said.

The stampede started as panic swept the head of the crowd with thousands pressing to get into the open-air venue at the Negev desert city of Arab to see the popular Israeli rock group, Machina.

Vietnam to grant amnesty to 2900: Vietnam is to grant an amnesty to 2,900 prisoners to mark the 50th anniversary of National Day in September, the Vietnam News Agency reported yesterday. Reuter reports from Hanoi.

The agency gave few details but said the names of the prisoners had been forwarded to President Le Duc Anh for approval.

Vietnam's national day falls on September 2.

Gambling tycoon Sasakawa dead: Japanese gambling tycoon and alleged World War II criminal Ryochi Sasakawa died of acute heart failure Tuesday at a Tokyo hospital, he was 96. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Sasakawa, a pre-war ultra-nationalist who met Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in December 1939, was jailed in 1945 as a suspected war criminal by US occupation forces, but released three years later before his case came to trial.

After the release, he became the chairman of a motorboat racing federation and headed the Sasakawa group, whose influence extended to both the political and business worlds.

School girl beaten to death: A Japanese school girl died a day after being hit by a teacher in a row over whether she should take an examination, police said yesterday. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

The incident happened after Tomomi Jinnai, 16, sat in a classroom for a test she was not supposed to take at Kinki University Women's Senior High School in Izuka, southern Japan on Monday.

The teacher, Akira Miyamoto, told her to leave, but she refused and they argued outside in the corridor.

Suu Kyi pays respect to her father: Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi laid flowers yesterday at the memorial to her father and eight others murdered in Yangon 48 years ago as they planned Myanmar's independence from Britain. AFP reports from Yangon.

The brief, three-minute appearance for martyrs' day was her first in public since her release July 10 from nearly six years of house arrest.

Quake hits Indonesian island: A moderate earthquake measuring 5.7 on the Richter scale jolted Indonesia's easternmost island of Irian on Tuesday, but there were no reports of damage or casualties, a meteorology officials said yesterday. Reuter reports from Jakarta.

The quake shook Nabire area late on Tuesday and there are no reports yet of damage or casualties, the Jakarta based official told Reuters.

20 die in Madagascar plane crash: Twenty passengers and crew were killed and 15 injured when a chartered plane crashed and exploded in flames in the Indian Ocean island of Madagascar on Tuesday, airport officials said. Reuter reports from Antananarivo.

Only one passenger survived unhurt when the Malagasy military Dakota DC-3 plane carrying a team of doctors from France and India hit the ground on the edge of the capital's airport, they said.

France departs 50 Zaireans: Some 50 Zaireans who allegedly entered France illegally were sent back to Kinshasa aboard a chartered aircraft late Tuesday in a new clampdown on immigrants, airport sources said. AFP reports from Paris.

The immigrant rights group Cimade, which broke the news of the expulsions earlier in the day, said the expulsion came after that of 50 Romanians last week, after Interior Minister Jean-Louis Debré announced weekly charter flights to clampdown on immigrants whose papers are not in order.

7 Algerians beheaded in attack: Seven Algerians were beheaded in an attack blamed by officials on Muslim militants and six people were killed in other incidents, newspapers said yesterday. Reuter reports from Algiers.

The seven, ranging in age from 15 to 52, were beheaded and their bodies were found last Monday near a road in Chattia town in western Chlef province. El Watan said, quoting residents and local officials.

101 surrender in Myanmar: A total of 101 anti-government insurgents surrendered last month to the Myanmar military regime, state-run Myanmar radio said Tuesday. AFP reports from Bangkok.

They included militant students, members of the ethnic Karen National Union (KNU) and Shan United Revolution Army (SURA) as well as fighters of opium warlord Khun Sa, radio Yangon said in a dispatch monitored in Bangkok.

Novelist Pramoedya awarded: Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer, 70, whose works have been banned in his home country, has been awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for literature, the award foundation announced in the Philippine capital, yesterday. AFP reports from Manila.

Pramoedya, whose works have been translated into 20 languages, received the award for his "illuminating with brilliant stores."

US, ROK agree to review SOFA

SEOUL, July 19: The United States and South Korea agreed here Tuesday to jointly review the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) which governs the rights of the 37,000 US troops stationed here, the Foreign Ministry said, reports AFP.

The joint announcement of the upcoming review, at the request of the South Korean side, was made after a meeting between US ambassador James Laney and Foreign Minister Gong Ro-myung, a ministry spokesman said.

Draft revisions would be drawn up in meetings in Seoul and Washington, he said, without speculating on when the review process would be completed.

Karadzic threatens to attack whoever sides with Muslims

PALE (Bosnia), July 19: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic warned today that his forces would attack any western troops or aircraft sent to protect the government-held enclave of Gorazde, reports Reuter.

Whoever sides militarily with the Muslims must be aware that this would entail a war against the Serbs we shall be forced in self-defence to shoot down the helicopters and aircraft which protect the Muslim (Bosnian government) army," Karadzic said in a statement.

Karadzic issued the threat as western governments considered a proposal from France to reinforce United Nations troops in the eastern

enclave of Gorazde — a UN declared 'safe area' — with the help of US helicopters and NATO warplanes.

The United States and Britain have yet to endorse the French plan.

France has urged tough military action after the Bosnian Serbs captured the Muslim pocket of Srebrenica last week and appeared poised to overrun the nearby Zepa enclave, both supposed UN 'safe areas.'

The president of the self-declared Bosnian Serb state said government troops have used the 'safe areas' to stage attacks against surrounding Serb forces.

The Muslim led government has accused the UN of failing to safeguard the civilians in the eastern 'safe area,' who have survived on scarce supplies due to a Serb blockade on regular aid deliveries.

Karadzic called on government defenders of Gorazde to disarm 'immediately.'

Should the Muslims in Gorazde decide to fight against the Serbs we shall not allow foreign armed forces to protect our enemies, he said in the statement issued from Bosnia, outside Sarajevo.

He added, 'we expect the international community to finally ascertain and recognise reality and to make possible an end to this war.'

Meanwhile, Bosnia's President Alija Izetbegovic defended on Tuesday his proposal to evacuate the wounded, ill and elderly from the enclave of Zepa, saying that 'ethnic cleansing' was preferable to death.

'There are worse things than ethnic cleansing... and that is ethnic killing,' said Izetbegovic in an interview broadcast on state television.

Izetbegovic asked the United Nations on Monday to mediate in negotiations with Bosnian Serb forces for the evacuation of the most vulnerable civilians from Zepa.

Zepa, a UN-designated 'safe area,' appears destined to fall to Serb forces, as did the nearby 'safe area' of Srebrenica a week ago.

Murayama likely to suffer setback in Sunday polls

TOKYO, July 19: Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's Socialist Party is likely to suffer a major setback in Japan's Upper House polls on Sunday, according to voter surveys published today by Japan's major newspapers, reports Reuter.

A Yomiuri Shimbun survey of 56,100 voters said Murayama's Socialists are likely to capture between 15 and 19 seats, less than his stated target of 22, while his three-party coalition may not retain all the seats it has up for re-election.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), senior partner in the coalition, looks set to capture about 50 seats, making it difficult for the coalition to win the 75 seats Murayama set as the goal for the bloc, said the Yomiuri, Japan's largest daily.

The survey, conducted between July 14 and 16, indicated that the opposition New Frontier Party (NFP) would win at least 30 seats, the paper said.



Japanese Prime Minister and Chairman of the Social Democratic Party Tomiichi Murayama (C), surrounded by plainclothes security policemen, waves to supporters after a campaign rally for the upcoming 23 July Upper House elections at Hitachitiga in Ibaraki prefecture, 100 kilometres northeast of Tokyo Tuesday. It will be the first national elections since Murayama took over as the prime minister last year. — AFP/UNB photo

Army patrols Beirut streets to enforce demonstration ban

BEIRUT, July 19: Lebanese Interior Minister Michel Murr who is also Deputy Prime Minister in Rafik al-Hariri's government, said that the Central Security Committee (CSC) has decided to send more patrols of the army and police forces to streets during the 'security day' in order to enforce a demonstration ban of government, reports Xinhua.

According to the CSC decision, more army units would be deployed in the capital and other main cities where labour trade unions have planned to stage demonstrations Wednesday in protest against a recent tax increase on petrol and some consumer goods.

The interior minister stressed that the military and security forces are determined to execute the order to prevent demonstrations.

Al-Murr chaired in the government building today a three-hour meeting of the CSC, which was attended by senior officers of the country's security and military institutions, governors and representatives of the Syrian army and the Syrian military intelligence in Lebanon.

At a press conference held at the end of the meeting, Al-Murr reiterated there is no justification for the demonstrations and the demonstrations would not force the

government to make a concession on the decisions (of tax increases).

He said no detailed measure to put down the demonstrations was discussed by the CSC meeting, emphasizing this subject is within the mission of the security forces.

'The security forces are not a team fighting the people, but its task is to maintain security of the nation and citizens,' Al-Murr asserted.

Answering a question on whether the security forces enforcing the demonstration ban are restricted from opening fire, he said, 'this is one of military cases.' But he expressed the hope that the demonstrations would be prevented without resorting to 'suppression.'

He noted at the same time that anyone wanted to provoke the security forces would be arrested.

In an extraordinary cabinet session chaired by President Elias Hrawi Monday night, the government authorizes the army and police forces to prevent the demonstrations in a fear that the demonstrations could be exploited by 'hostile elements.'

Meanwhile, the government designated Minister of Labour Asaad Hardan to continue dialogue with trade union leaders.

Taiwan protests China's planned missile testing

TAIPEI, July 19: Taiwan launched a strenuous protest today against a plan by China to conduct missile testing in the sea north of Taiwan and local stocks tumble as investors saw the move as a direct threat to this island, reports Reuter.

'Regarding communist China carrying out a missile test in the sea in the near term, the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) raises a serious protest,' an MAC statement said.

The testing is expected to run for a week from this Friday and be conducted about 100 km (62 miles) north of Taiwan's Northern coast.

The statement also said that the surface-to-surface missile tests, announced by agency on Tuesday, are seen as a threat.

Nigerian junta asked to show clemency on coup plotters

LAGOS, July 19: The United States has appealed to Nigerian head of state General Sani Abacha and the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) to show clemency on the suspected coup plotters who may face death sentences by Nigeria's special military tribunal, reports Xinhua.

A statement, signed by a spokesman for the US Department of State, Nicholas Burns, said they can do this 'by commuting any death sentences that may have been proposed.'

General Abacha and the PRC have an historic opportunity to demonstrate leadership toward reconciliation,' the statement, released here today said.

The PRC, the highest decision-making body in Nigeria, is yet to meet to consider the report of the military tribunal which tried the suspected coup plotters.

Sparing the lives of the accused and allowing an open appeal process,' Burns said, 'will be consistent with the Nigerian government's professed commitment to due process.'

AFP adds: Nigerian ruler General Sani Abacha is under intense pressure to commute sentences on alleged coup plotters, including ex-head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo.

The latest was an open appeal on Tuesday by a team of eminent Commonwealth persons that has been investigating human rights violation in Nigeria following international concern about the secret trial of the coup plot suspects.

'Without prejudice to the rights, wrongs and validity of the trial we urge your excellency and the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) in the use of your authority to temper the judgement of the tribunal by exercising sensitivity, generosity and leniency,' it said. 'In particular, we appeal that no death penalties be applied,' it added.

Led by former Canadian Foreign Minister Flora MacDonald and comprising former Zimbabwean Chief Justice Enoch Dumbutshena and Trinidadian Neville Linton, the team has been in Nigeria for the past 13 days but has not met Abacha himself.

Off the Record

To save her li'l sis'

LONDON: A teenager who killed her grandfather after suffering years of sexual abuse at his hands was freed Tuesday by a court in Cardiff, Wales, after the judge said 'she had suffered enough,' reports AFP.

Mary Smith, 18, who had been abused since the age of three, had pleaded guilty to killing her 71-year-old grandfather with a 35-centimetre (14-inch) kitchen knife after he said he would turn his attentions to her 12-year-old sister.

Investigators concluded she had been influenced by a popular television soap opera, Brook Side, in which a character killed her husband who had abused their elder daughter for fear he would start on the younger.

Police found references to the episode in Smith's diary and newspaper cuttings relating acts of vengeance by victims of sexual abuse.

Hey! She's here eating pizza!

DENVER: Celebrity watchers have been searching for Princess Diana and her two sons at all the posh places in the Colorado Rockies but it seems she's taking a real American holiday going bowling and eating pizza, reports Reuter.

Diana, the estranged wife of Britain's Prince Charles, was spotted last week at El Jebel Bowling Alley in El Jebel, Colorado. Colorado said Matt Stecklein, assistant manager at his family bowling alley.

She was with her two sons and a couple of other guys, said Stecklein who declined to give Diana's shoe size. The bowling shoes she rented were put back on the shelf to be reused, he said.

Over the weekend, the royals and a few friends ordered pizzas at Pizza Mama's near the bowling alley, said Garrett Del Castillo, who waited on the group.

'Diana didn't say a word and I didn't recognise her right away. Hey this is El Jebel, Colorado,' said Del Castillo.

El Jebel is about 40 miles (65km) west of Aspen, the trendy ski resort town. The Princess arrived in Denver last week but has managed to elude reporters and photographers.

Absent-minded doctor

TALLAHASSEE, Florida: A doctor who amputated a toe without consent five months after he removed the wrong leg of another patient has had his license suspended, reports AFP.

Florida State Medical Authorities ruled that Dr Rolando Sanchez 'presents an immediate and serious danger to the health, safety and welfare of the public.'

The State Agency for Health Care Administration issued the order on Friday.

Sanchez in February mistakenly removed the right leg of a 51-year-old patient who was to have his other leg amputated. The bungled was attributed to a series of paperwork mistakes.

Another patient who consented to have dead tissue removed from her right foot woke up hours later to find a toe missing.

Sanchez amputated the patient's toe but later denied doing so to a nursing supervisor, stating that 'it had fallen off' according to the emergency order.

Troops start offensive against Dostam's forces

KABUL, July 19: Fighting broke out today between troops loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani and forces of his rival General Abdul Rashid Dostam in western Afghanistan, a military spokesman said, reports AFP.

'This morning we started our leap-up operations against the enemy who have occupied Morghab,' said General Azimi.

Morghab is a district centre in Baghis province, which together with neighbouring Ghorghach centre, was taken over by General Dostam's forces three days ago.

Military forces of Rabbani's ally, Ismael Khan, who is also governor of western Herat province, control most of the surrounding provinces of Baghis, Ghor, Farah and Nimroz.

'Morghab and Gormach had been demilitarised for the past three months in an agreement reached by the elders of these districts,' Azimi, military spokesman for Ismael Khan told AFP.

He claimed the Uzbek occupation, led by Dostam's right-hand man, General Rasool Pahlawan, was in violation of agreement.

'Currently they hold the town and positions east of Morghab River and our forces are west of the river,' Azimi said.

He said no concurrent jet attacks by Dostam had been made on Herat city.

Dostam and Ismael Khan had agreed not to bomb their respective capitals Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat under an arrangement reached through the intermediary offices of the United Nations in July 1994, he said.

Observers said the alleged Uzbek incursion into Baghis province comes at a time when Dostam was being hard-pressed further east by troops loyal to Rabbani's main commander, Ahmad Shah Masood.

Fighting between Masood's men and Dostam's forces continues in central Bamian province near the district centre of Yakaulang, which is some 30 kilometres (18 miles) west of the once-famous tourist attraction of the coloured Bank-I-Amir lakes.

The capture of Yakaulang is strategically important for Masood as it would not only open up an overland corridor for the first time linking his forces with those of Ismael Khan, but also allow easier military supply to his men fighting in the mountains.

Russian PM's speech on Chechnya ridiculed

MOSCOW, July 19: Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin faced jeering by Russian nationalists in the Lower House of parliament today when he spoke on moves to end the Chechnya conflict.

Defending peace talks that he initiated and arguing that the bloodshed in the north Caucasus territory had to be stopped, Chernomyrdin declared: 'everything must be done to achieve this.'

He faced heckling from extreme right deputies including Nikolai Lysenko, head of the Radical National Republican Party of Russia, who shouted 'murderer' and 'traitor' at him after he had spoken.

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Draft revisions would be drawn up in meetings in Seoul and Washington, he said, without speculating on when the review process would be completed.

Only India grows poppy legally to save human life

JHALAWAR, India, July 19: Cultivating the poppy plant is a tedious, back-breaking process, but India has 10.4 million farmers who grow the lucrative crop, reports IPS.

And while their counterparts in nearby South-East Asia are constantly being hounded by authorities, India's laws allow opium farmers to grow poppies for medicinal and scientific use.

The South Asian country is now the world's largest and only legal producer of opium. Official figures show it exports nearly 700 metric tonnes to the United States and the United Kingdom alone at US 50 dollars per kg.

To meet the growing demand, the area under poppy cultivation has been doubled from 13,000 hectares in 1987-88 to 26,000 hectares in 1994-95.

'Opium gives 50 per cent more profit than any other crop and I have had a crop of five kgs,' says Ramgopal, a local opium grower here, as he twirls his lush mustache in apparent satisfaction.

Opium has been a traditional crop grown in the Malwa plateau of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh and in western Indian Rajasthan since the days of the Mughal Emperor Akbar's reign in the 16th century.

'Opium is more sought after than the concentrated poppy straw cultivated in Turkey and Australia, because

the latter, despite being capital-intensive, lacks the alkaloids used in medicines,' says an Indian Narcotics Bureau official.

The alkaloid content of opium is used in making morphine for pain killers and in cancer drugs. But its seeds are used as an aromatic spice in traditional Indian cooking.

The poppy seeds are sown in October or early November and harvested between March and April. The crop needs a perfect blend of water, air and temperature for maximum yield.

The field has to be ploughed eight to nine times and, before sowing, the soil has to be enriched by dung, urea and plenty of water. Once the capsule shaped poppy fruit is ripe, a three-edged knife is used to cut it to extract opium.

India's department of narcotics constantly monitors the entire process from issuing licences, measuring the field, weighing and finally collecting the opium from the cultivators.

But it has been unable to control the pilferage of stocks for making heroin, brown sugar and hashish.

While the government pays only US 8 dollar per kg for the crop, the black market value of opium is anything between US 250 for a kg in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to US 1,050 in Uttar Pradesh.

This makes poppy cultivators targets for armed attacks

by thieves. In this area of Rajasthan, the Kanjar group of indigenous people who depend on stealing for their livelihood are often blamed for the murders of poppy cultivators for a small fraction of their yield.

This year, three opium farmers have already been killed and several others beaten up in a single village in this southern district.

Surprisingly, the plant's narcotic product has not tempted the cultivators in Jhalwar to get addicted to opiates.

'It is in fact people in western Rajasthan where the crop is not grown, who are addicted,' says Hari Ram of Peepliya village where 40 farmers cultivate the crop.

Yeltsin appears on TV

MOSCOW, July 19: President Boris Yeltsin has appeared on television for the first time since he was taken to hospital a week ago to tell Russia he has had a heart attack but will soon be back at work, reports Reuter.

Yeltsin whose sudden illness created waves of speculation over his future at the head of the vast Russian Federation, seemed fit and optimistic when he gave an interview to Russian television from the hospital where he is being treated.

Russian people need not worry, he said, adding that he was grateful for the telegrams and letters he had received since his heart problem was announced last week.