

BRIEFLY

Bosnian defenders of the enclave of Srebrenica wounded in fighting against Serbian Serbs, lay on stretchers after being carried by their comrades through the Serb lines in the woods near Kalesija, Wednesday. Some 4,000 Muslim soldiers from the 2nd Corps made their way through the besieged eastern Bosnian enclave. — AFP/UNB photo

Ukraine closes N-reactor: A reactor at Zaporojje Nuclear Plant in southern Ukraine was shut down overnight due to a malfunction in its pump, the Interfax-Ukraine News Agency reported Thursday. AFP reports from Ukraine.

The number two reactor at the plant, Ukraine's largest and one of the biggest in Europe, was immediately shut down when the malfunction was detected and there was no leak of radioactivity, a local civil defence official was quoted as saying.

Heat wave toll now 11 in Spain: A heat wave in southern Spain has killed 11 people, most of them elderly, hospital officials said on Thursday. Reuter reports from Seville.

The heart attack death of a 46-year-old jogger in Madrid was also attributed to the heat.

Spanish PM denies allegations: Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez said on Thursday allegations linking him with anti-guerrilla activities were made by those under judicial investigations and that he had no intention of resigning, Reuter reports from Madrid. This is a campaign and a strategy designed by those who are facing charges, Gonzalez said in a televised news conference.

Australians protest N-test: Demonstrators chained themselves to the front of the French Embassy to protest France's plans to resume nuclear tests at Mururoa Atoll in the South Pacific. AP reports from Canberra.

They also unveiled a large banner on the front of the building that said "SOS Mururoa."

Clashes leave 15 dead in Turkey: Fifteen people died in fighting in south-east Turkey overnight Thursday, the semi-official Anatolian News Agency reported. AFP reports from Ankara.

Ten village guardians — pro-government Kurdish militia and five separatist Kurds died during separate clashes in south-east Anatolia. Members of the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) attacked guard posts at the village of Uzundere in the province of Hakkari.

Filipino vice mayor killed: Unidentified gunmen killed the vice mayor of a northern town and his security escort Friday during an early morning ambush, police said. AP reports from San Fernando, Philippines.

Vice Mayor Anastasio Manuel and Dominador Samartin were walking along a road at 6 am (2200 GMT Thursday) in Mayantoc town when they were killed by the gunmen, regional Police Chief Superintendent Dion Ventura said.

Floods claim 23 in Pakistan: Torrential rains and flash floods killed 23 people in Pakistan's southern provinces, newspapers reported Friday. AP says from Islamabad.

At least 12 people, including a family of five, drowned in by flash floods Thursday in Balochistan province, the English-language daily Dawn reported. In Sind province, three people were electrocuted by damaged utility poles, and at least 17 people were injured by the rains, which swept away hundreds of mud-and-straw houses and caused heavy damage to roads and crops.

Drug dealer held in Pakistan: A Pakistani national described as the mastermind of a network smuggling heroin to European countries has been arrested by the Anti-Narcotic Force (ANF), officials said Thursday. AFP reports from Islamabad.

The man, identified as Zulfikar Ali Shah alias Bedi Shah, was taken into custody at the Islamabad airport Wednesday along with two accomplices, ANF Director, Brigadier Mohammad Aslam told reporters.

G-77 preparing resolution to condemn N-tests

MANILA, July 21: The Group of 77 developing countries is preparing a resolution condemning nuclear tests, Philippine foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon said today, reports Reuter.

He told reporters the G-77 was preparing a general statement against nuclear testing by all nations, to be discussed at a meeting by the group in September.

The resolution would not single out the controversial nuclear testing programme of France, due to start in the South Pacific in September, but would address the issue in general, he said.

Bid to create communal tension alleged

Hindus clash with cops in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, July 21: Hindu activists clashed with police in this Kashmiri city today as protests erupted over a bomb blast allegedly caused by Muslim guerrillas that killed 20 people and injured 60 more on Thursday, reports AFP.

Hundreds of activists stoned police and stray vehicles that ventured into the streets in defiance of a dawn-to-dusk strike called by Hindu nationalist groups, witnesses said.

Police were attacked in at least five residential areas of the city, but it was not clear whether anyone was hurt, police said.

"The situation in Kashmir is getting from bad to worse," Chamam Lal Gupta, president of the Kashmir branch of the Hindu-dominated Indian People's Party, told AFP.

"Somebody must be held responsible for the explosion," he added, as party activists went around the city enforcing the strike. "We know that the blast is aimed at creating (Hindu-Muslim) tension."

Shops, banks, post offices and other businesses closed today across the city in the strike, which was called by the Hindu group Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS). The main opposition Indian People's Party is the political wing of the RSS, and both have a strong following in Jammu.

Residents said city streets were virtually deserted save vehicles belonging to the police and federal paramilitary troops, hundreds of whom were deployed across the city to prevent violence.

Though Jammu's population of 700,000 people is dominated by Hindus, Kashmir is largely Muslim, and a drive to secede from India has claimed more than 12,000 lives in the region since 1989.

A 10 kilogram (22-pound) bomb planted in a scooter parked outside a state-run school exploded here late Thursday, killing at least 20 people and injuring 60 others, several critically, doctors said.

Police blamed the explosion on Muslim guerrillas and said they had arrested 13 suspects.

It was one of the worst bomb blasts ever in Jammu and triggered a stampede of panicked bystanders.

Three shops adjoining the two-story school were destroyed and another 10 buildings were damaged in the deafening explosion, which was heard nearly two kilometers (1.24 miles) away.

"It seemed like an earthquake," said Madan Lal, 55, a Hindu who was admitted to a hospital for severe burns.

Immediately after the blast, the street resembled a battlefield, with mangled bodies, broken furniture and blood-stained cloths strewn all over. Police said they were still examining the wreckage.

The blast proved that Muslim rebels had extended their zone of operation from the Kashmir Valley despite government claims that it had the situation under control, Gupta said.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat listens to the Israeli Communication Minister Shumalit Aloni, after the end of their talks in Arafat's office in Gaza City Thursday. The two discussed issues over the peace process and the new target date of July 25 to reach a deal to extend the Palestinian autonomy in the occupied West Bank. — AFP/UNB photo

Tigers step up attack on Lankan forces

COLOMBO, July 21: Tamil guerrillas today stepped up attacks on security forces, killing four more soldiers and losing two of their own in an ambush in northeast Sri Lanka, locally military officials said, reports AFP.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels surprised the soldiers in the Muttur area in coastal Trincomalee district when the troops were returning to base after a failed ambush on militants in the region, officials said.

At least two LTTE guerrillas were confirmed killed in the gun battle, officials said.

Govt-MQM talks adjourned

ISLAMABAD, July 21: The Pakistan government and Karachi's powerful ethnic group, Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), Thursday adjourned until next week their talks aimed at restoring peace to the violence-torn port city, reports AFP.

A brief announcement, after a four-hour session between negotiating teams from the two sides, said the next round would convene in Karachi on Monday.

The longest break since the dialogue started in Islamabad on July 13 followed the death in Karachi of the mother of the official team leader, Law Minister Nabi Dad Khan, officials said.

Meanwhile, at least six people died Thursday in Karachi — four in sniper firing and shootouts with security personnel and two in a clash between rival student groups at a technical institute.

Ajmal Dehvi, head of the MQM negotiating team, told reporters he had made four suggestions to the government to bring peace to Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and commercial hub.

He declined to give details, but said the proposals were in addition to the demands already submitted by the MQM dealing with the political and social grievances of the Mohajir community of migrants from India.

The law minister too refused to divulge the latest MQM proposals, but said the government would make "serious" efforts to implement them.

Sources close to the negotiations said the proposals were mainly related to the operations by para-military rangers and police in Karachi and the government demand for surrender of arms by MQM militants.

Dehvi said the government should refrain from the use of force in Karachi, adding the onus for killings in the city lay with those in charge of maintaining law and order.

Chirac for stability in the Mediterranean

RABAT, July 21: French President Jacques Chirac, praising Morocco's role as an anchor in troubled North Africa, has proposed that their countries join hands across the Mediterranean to create a "lake of stability," reports Reuter.

"Why should not France and Morocco take the initiative, at the appropriate time, to propose a pact of stability for the Mediterranean to ease tensions and build our common future," Chirac told a banquet given by King Hassan on Thursday night.

"Morocco ... by its geographical proximity (to Europe) and its remarkable stability in an uncertain and troubled environment, occupies a special position in the heart of Europeans and particularly of the French," Chirac said.

France sees Morocco under King Hassan, who has been on the throne for more than 30 years, as a bulwark against the spread of Muslim fundamentalist violence, now centred in Algeria.

Some 40,000 people have died in political violence in Algeria, which shares a border with Morocco, since the army-backed authorities annulled elections in 1992 which Islamists were poised to win.

Chirac's choice of Morocco as the first stop of a tour of former French colonies in Africa signalled the central role Paris assigns to King Hassan's moderating influence.

Morocco has resisted attempts to be drawn into a strategic alliance with its North African neighbours, arguing that it cannot be compared with Algeria nor with Libya, which is under UN sanctions.

King Hassan, in his banquet speech, said Morocco was renewing its application to join the European Union as a full member and asked Chirac to support the bid.

Chirac, who spoke after the king, did not respond but stuck to the prepared text saying Morocco could rely on France to act as its spokesman in association talks with the EU.

France has promoted the idea to the EU-Mediterranean association accords to bolster peace and stability. Tunisia became the first North African country to sign a deal this week.

Chirac did not mention Bosnia in his speech although war in former Yugoslavia dominated world news on Friday.



French President Jacques Chirac takes off his shoes to visit the Great Mosque Hassan II, Thursday during his visit to Casablanca, on his second day of the two day stop in Morocco, during his five-day trip in Africa. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Royal appeal to 'adopt a veg'

LONDON: Prince Charles, who has admitted that he sometimes talks to his plants, is urging Britons to follow his example and adopt a vegetable, reports AFP.

Among some of the 700 vegetables under threat from European Union (EU) regulations are the boothby blonde cucumber, Granddad's multicoloured runner beans, blue-fleshed potatoes, red elephant carrots and white Windsor broad beans.

The prince has launched 'adopt a veg,' an appeal to save thousands of vegetable varieties threatened with extinction because of EU rules which forbid the sale of their seed.

He has acted on behalf of the Henry Doubleday Research Association which claims that Britain has lost more than 2,000 varieties since the 1970s, and says hundreds more are threatened by EU regulations which require seedsmen to pay hundreds of pounds (dollars) to register each variety.

The Prince launched the scheme at the beginning of July and since then a spokesman for the research organisation says the centre has been inundated with application forms from people wanting to pay their 12 pound (17 dollar) sponsorship fee.

Snake in cockpit

CHITA, Russia: Pilots of a Russian jetliner sat absolutely still for more than three hours before making an unscheduled landing with a snake in the cockpit, a news agency reported Friday, says AP.

The Tu-154 had just taken off from Chita en route to Moscow when the pilots discovered their "dangerous stowaway," ITAR-Tass said, citing a report in the Chita daily Narodnaya Gazeta.

The pilots finally landed their plane in the western Siberian city of Omsk, where the snake was removed, ITAR-Tass said. It did not identify the type of snake or say when the flight occurred.

Authorities speculated that the snake stowaway boarded the plane in China, because the jet had made a trip to Harbin in eastern China the day before.

Credit goes to drugs!

HONG KONG: Robber who took a heavy dose of tranquillisers before carrying out a robbery and forgot to make his getaway has been jailed for three years, reports AFP.

Fu Wing-Lei, 20, was sentenced to three years imprisonment Thursday after he pleaded guilty to the robbery and possessing an imitation gun.

Fu held up a tailor's shop on January 26 and took 1,700 Hong Kong dollars (220 US) but caught nearby after he ambled away in a daze, counting his loot, according to testimony.

According to his lawyer, Fu had taken six Rohypnol drug tablets and drank one and half cans of beer before carrying out his robbery.

They get the chance to upgrade their status

SAN FRANCISCO: Authorities here sought Friday a group of thieves who stole a suitcase not knowing they were making off with the latest in James Bond-style weaponry, reports AFP.

The briefcase, a demonstration model belong to federal agents, was equipped with a revolver that can be activated by remote control. It was stolen Tuesday on route to an exhibit on crime.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms wanted to display the igneous weapon that once belonged to a criminal to illustrate the sophisticated technology available to law breakers, said Mark Logan, ATF spokesman here.

Four men snatched the briefcase from a messenger who was busy with other deliveries when his truck containing the prized weapon and other parcels including computers was stolen.

ROK plans to make fresh peace proposal to DPRK

SEOUL, July 21: South Korea plans to make a new peace proposal to rival Communist North Korea in mid-August aimed at reducing tensions in one of the last remaining outposts of the Cold War, officials said Friday, reports AP.

The peace package is expected to include a proposal for a meeting between the leaders of the two Koreas and a new peace mechanism that will replace the cease-fire that maintains the current fragile peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Seoul officials said President Kim Young-sam will propose a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in a speech on August 15, marking the 50th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule.

Kim also will propose replacing the current armistice with a permanent peace treaty signed by Seoul and Pyongyang and guaranteed by Washington and Beijing, they said.

Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun reported that Seoul also hopes the governments of neighbouring Japan and Russia will endorse the new peace mechanism.

Kim plans to discuss the proposal with President Clinton during a meeting in Washington next week, news reports said.

Washington, Beijing and Pyongyang signed the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War. The US-led United Nations Command fought on Seoul's side in the war, while China contributed troops to the North.

Officials refused to speculate on how the North would respond to the new proposal.

North Korea has demanded that the armistice be replaced by a peace treaty signed by Pyongyang and Washington that would exclude Seoul, which the North calls a US puppet.

In recent years, North Korea has withdrawn from the armistice commission, persuaded China to pull out its delegates, and evicted outside monitors to undermine the cease-fire system and force talks with Washington.

On Friday, Naewoe Press, Seoul's official monitor of North Korea's media, reported that North Korean Foreign Minister Kim Young Nam recently sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali demanding the withdrawal of the UN Command from Seoul.

Without a peace treaty, the divided Korean Peninsula remains still at war.

LTTE may deploy WWII-style Kamikaze pilots soon

COLOMBO, July 21: Sri Lanka's separatist guerrillas are using more suicide bombers and may soon deploy kamikaze pilots like the Japanese air force did during World War II, analysts here say, reports AFP.

The latest strike against the navy's largest command ship, the Edithara, was carried out Sunday by 17 suicide bombers of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The attack blunted a military drive against the rebel held Jaffna town.

Unlike the Japanese kamikaze pilots who are said to have sunk some 40 US ships and damaged more than 100 in 1945, the Sri

Lankan Tamil "Black Tigers," have staged smaller but more varied acts since their first mission against an army camp in 1987.

The group has used suicide bombers with deadly accuracy to devastate the military headquarters here as well as to assassinate a president, a prime minister and an opposition leader and sink nearly a dozen navy craft.

It may not be long before the Tigers acquire kamikaze pilots military analysts believe. The group is known to have acquired six micro-light aircraft and the government takes the threat of an aerial attack seriously.

Anti aircraft guns have been mounted on the roof

tops of several buildings near president Chandrika Kumaratunga's residence here for fear of a kamikaze attack.

The fanatical Tigers are said to consider it a privilege to die in the name of Eelam, the separate state they are fighting to set up in Sri Lanka's northern and eastern regions.

The Tigers claim to have too many volunteers, the "martyrs" needed for anti-government missions are chosen through a lottery. The names are put down on paper and lots drawn by Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran so that all volunteers get an equal chance.

Before they go on their final mission, they have a last

supper with the leader and pose for photographs. We feel something in our hearts after the attack LTTE official D Varatharajah said in Jaffna recently.

The Tiger suicide cadres are often young boys and girls with secondary school education.

They belong to a conservative Tamil Hindu society better known as survivalist rather than suicidal, however, the long drawn out war seems to have transformed them.

On every street in Jaffna, the capital of Tamil separatism, is a monument to a dead hero. Coloured photographs of those who died in the name of Eelam are widely

revered.

The Tigers have an elaborate welfare set up caring for the families of those who die for Eelam. Suicide is also favoured from of evading arrest.

To ensure quick death, the Tigers carry a cyanide capsule worn around the neck.

The LTTE is charged with using a woman suicide bomber to assassinate former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at an election rally in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, in May 1991.

Two years later, an LTTE cadre who had infiltrated President Ranasinghe Premadasa's household killed him during a May Day rally

Georgian leader accused of being authoritarian

TBILISI, Georgia, July 21: A powerful opposition lawmaker on Friday accused Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze of authoritarian rule and called for collecting signatures to force his dismissal, reports AP.

"Shevardnadze is trying to establish a dictatorship, covering his intention by talks about democracy," Dzhaba Ioseliani, a member of the Georgian parliament and the leader of a powerful paramilitary group which Shevardnadze disbanded in May, told a news conference.

"We don't bury our martyrs," said LTTE official Varatharajah. "We plant them because they come up again."

Shevardnadze has blamed heavily armed members of the 3,000-strong Mkhedristi,