

## BRIEFLY

**Mine blast kills 4 in Kashmir:** A land mine blew up in the capital of Jammu-Kashmir state Saturday, killing four civilians and injuring 17 others, police and witnesses said. AP reports from Srinagar.

Six of the injured persons were in critical condition, police said on condition of anonymity. The explosion occurred when a child picked up the mine and was playing with it on a street, witnesses said.

**US relief worker held in Lanka:** Police detained an American relief worker and are questioning the Anglican Bishop of Sri Lanka over their alleged involvement with Tamil separatists, police said Saturday. AP reports from Colombo.

Kenneth Mulder, who works with the National Christian Council in Colombo, was taken into custody Friday while trying to cross into the northern rebel-held area, police said.

**Japanese FM to visit Australia:** Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei Kono is considering a visit to Australia in late August to make a joint protest against France's planned nuclear tests in the south Pacific, a newspaper said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Kono, who is also vice prime minister in the government led by Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama, wants to meet Prime Minister Paul Keating and Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in Sydney, the Sankei Shimbun said.

**Crackdown on sex trade in China:** Chinese authorities have caught 113,000 people in five-month crackdown on the nation's booming sex trade and are threatening harsh punishment for officials who abet prostitution, a Hong Kong newspaper said Saturday. AP reports from Hong Kong.

The nation-wide January to May crackdown uncovered 58,000 cases of prostitution, which thrives in hotels, bars, nightclubs, barber shops and saunas, according to Ta Kung Pao, a China-funded daily.

**5 murderers beheaded in KSA:** Five convicted Saudi murderers were beheaded in the Kingdom on Friday, bringing the total number of executions in Saudi Arabia this year to 121, according to an unofficial count. Reuters reports from Dubai.

A Saudi Interior Ministry statement, reported by Gulf News agencies, said the five were found guilty of murdering Tafer al-Shihri and burning his corpse. They also sold his car and divided the money.

**Quake jolts northwest China:** An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.8 jolted China's northwestern Gansu province Saturday morning, the State Seismological Bureau said. AP reports from Beijing.

A bureau official who declined to be identified said it was too soon to tell whether there were any casualties. The Gansu Seismological Bureau has sent an emergency team to check on loss of life and property, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

**Kurds go on hunger strike in Paris:** Some 150 Kurds went on a hunger strike in a downtown Paris church on Friday in a sign of solidarity with their compatriots detained in Turkey. Kurdish organisers and police said. AFP reports from Paris.

Police were trying to negotiate with the hunger strikers to get them to leave the enormous St. Eustache Cathedral and go elsewhere.

**5 pickpockets held in Singapore:** Five Colombians, including three pregnant women, have been arrested on suspicion of picking pockets in Singapore, police said Friday. AP reports from Singapore.

The four women between 30 and 40 years old and a 25-year-old man from Colombia are believed to have struck at least 16 times since they arrived on July 13, posing as tourists.

**Ghana's finance minister resigns:** Ghana's Finance Minister Kwesi Botchway has left office after 13 years. Ghana Radio reported. Reuters says from Abidjan.

His resignation, offered a week ago, was accepted on Friday by President Jerry Rawlings, the radio said in a report heard by the BBC.

**8 peasants killed in Mexico:** Eight peasants were shot and hacked to death this week by a group of people who accused them of witchcraft in a remote region of Chiapas in the south of the country, the news agency Notimex said. AFP reports from Mexico City.

The slayings occurred in a place named 'La Cuerva or the cave', in the community of El Monte, near the border between the states of Chiapas and Tabasco, a government official told Notimex on Thursday.

## US singles out China as 'major problem' in Asia

WASHINGTON, July 22: The State Department's top official on Asia Friday defended US policy in the region, singling out China as a "major problem" and praising US ties with Korea and Japan, reports AFP.

"On the whole we think movement in Asia is positive," Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Winston Lord said.

"But China is a major problem, no question about it."

The former US ambassador faulted both sides for the widening rift between Beijing and Washington, saying "I don't think anyone has acted with perfect wisdom."

Beijing, "vastly over reacted" to private US visit in June by the President of Taiwan, he said, emphasizing

that Washington's policy of recognizing Beijing and maintaining only unofficial contacts with Taipei was unchanged.

"Congress has not acted with splendid statesmanship either," he told an Asia Society Conference on Korea, one day before South Korean President Kim Young-Sam was expected to arrive in San Francisco.

Lord cited 17 US trade agreements with Japan, including one on civil aviation Friday, and a US-brokered deal aimed at dismantling North Korea's suspected nuclear arms programmes as major US achievements in Asia.

The North Korean nuclear deal has broad-based support despite skepticism in Congress, Lord said.

## Clash leaves 36 killed in Peru

LIMA, July 22: Guerrillas ambushed an army column in Peru's eastern jungle region in a clash that killed 36 soldiers and rebels, the military said Friday, reports AP.

The ambush happened Thursday afternoon near the town of Tingo Maria, 200 miles (325 kilometres) northeast of Lima, the Defence Ministry said. The military said 16 soldiers were killed and six wounded, and 20 Shining Path guerrillas were killed. It said an undetermined number of rebels were wounded.

Initial radio reports said 15 to 20 soldiers had been killed.

## Amarnath Yatra may endanger Western hostages' lives

SRINAGAR, July 22: The presence of thousands of soldiers along the Himalayas for next week's Hindu pilgrimage could threaten Kashmiri militants and endanger the lives of five Westerners they are holding hostage, officials said Saturday, reports AP.

Even though Muslim guerrillas have banned the Amarnath Yatra, or Pilgrimage, the Indian government is determined to allow about 70,000 Hindus to trek to an icy cave in Kashmir from August 1.

With general elections barely a year away, Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao fears criticism from Hindus, who account for 82 per cent

of the 900 million population, would help the main opposition group, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

Meanwhile, there was little information Saturday about the two hostages the Al-Faran outfit claimed were injured in a gunbattle it fought with Indian soldiers.

The government has denied any such incident took place Friday.

Al-Faran has said it is holding hostage two Britons, an American, one German and one Norwegian, and has threatened to kill them unless the government releases 21 jailed Kashmiri rebels.

The militant group said in a statement that the gun bat-

tle also killed two soldiers and wounded others, including a guerrilla.

The statement did not name the two hostages or whether their injuries were serious. But it said, "We were successful in talking the tourists to a safe place alive."

"The whole story is baseless," said I. Ramamohan Rao, spokesman in New Delhi for the federally run Kashmiri government.

Meanwhile, preparations for the pilgrimage are going on at a feverish pace. Soldiers are pitching tents along the mountainous route, building sand bunkers for their machine guns and scouring the roads for land mines.

The pilgrimage has be-

come the focus of Hindu-Muslim resentment in recent times. Chanting ancient Sanskrit hymns, the devout climb 5,500 feet (1,650 meters) from the tourist town of Pahalgam to the Amarnath cave to worship an ice idol of Shiva, the Protector-Destroyer God in the Hindu pantheon.

Last year, some militant groups banned the pilgrimage, but an estimated 50,000 Hindus still showed up and the pilgrimage was peaceful.

This year, the kidnapping incident has worried the government and Western diplomats helping to secure the release of the hostages.

Diplomats from the United States and Britain re-

quested the Indian government to either halt the pilgrimage or make it low-key.

But Indian officials ignored their pleas, apparently because the government does not want to bow to the militants' ban.

Relations between Hindus and Muslims, which soured after the Kashmiri insurrection began in 1989, have worsened after the rebels announced the ban on the pilgrimage.

Kashmir is the only state where Muslims are in a majority. Elsewhere, they are outnumbered nearly seven times by Hindus. The militants leading the Jihad, or Independence, see the pil-

## Off the Record

### Neither God nor ghost but look alike

NEW DELHI: Crowds thronged the New Delhi house of a man they believed rose from his ashes and had superhuman powers, newspapers reported Saturday, says AP.

But the family of Ajay Chopra had a hard time convincing them that the drug addict was neither God nor ghost and that they had wrongly cremated a body of another man who looked like him.

Newspapers said Chopra often disappeared from his home. His relatives said they found a man lying on the sidewalk who not only looked like Chopra but also responded to his nickname, "Happy."

They took him home Friday, fed him a meal of rice and meat curry and let him sleep, all without holding a conversation. The man died within a few hours.

The family then cremated him, according to Hindu practices. Shortly after they came home, Chopra staggered in.

As word spread about the incident, hundreds of people came to the house, believing Chopra had magical powers. Many fell at his feet, others showered money on him and sought his blessings. Police were called in to regulate the crowds.

### They're too shy

JERUSALEM: A copy of Michael Angelo's nearly 500-year-old statue of the Biblical king David in the nude is still too shocking to be shown publicly in Jerusalem, reports Reuters.

The city rather turned down a replica of the 16th century statue offered as a gift by the Italian city of Florence, where the original is housed to mark 3,000 years since David's conquest of Jerusalem.

We initially accepted the gift but then we got appeals from people who were outraged that the naked statue would be placed in public so we and to turn it down, said Deputy Mayor David Cassuto, whose city is home to many religiously observant Jews, Muslims and Christians.

### Einstein's son?

NEW YORK: A Prague physicist claims he is the son of Albert Einstein, but was switched at birth and was raised by a woman whose infant died the day he was born. The New York Times reported Saturday, says AP.

Ludek Zakel, 63, told the paper: "I may not be able to prove it, but I know I am his son. I cannot profit from being Einstein's son. I can only lose money. I cannot reverse the course of my life or change it in any way. So why would I lie?"

Interviewed in his apartment outside Prague, Zakel said in 1972 Einstein's step-daughter sent a friend to tell him that his real mother was Einstein's second wife, Elsa, and that he was raised by a woman whose child died the day he was born. The Times said.

To back up his tale, Zakel, who bears a resemblance to Einstein, said he has written statements from two nurses who have been dead for years, the vow of a possible half sister, and the signed statement of 93-year-old Eva Zakel, who would not talk to the paper.

Mrs Zakel gave birth to a child April 14, 1932 — a child who she said died and was switched with the son of 50-year-old Elsa Einstein. Mrs Einstein had gone to Prague because she thought she had a tumor but really was pregnant. The Times said.

It was assumed Einstein and his second wife had a relatively platonic relationship.

Zakel's former wife, Dr Karla Zakel, a pediatrician in a Prague suburb, told The Times: "Ludek is a very strange man. I do think he is honest, though. He isn't capable of such elaborate forgery or plotting."

### The magic touch worked as if in a fairytale

HEREFOR, England: A Roman Catholic priest here came out of a coma from which he had not been expected to recover after the 300-year-old mummified hand of a saint was placed on his forehead, his assistant said, reports AFP.

Father Christopher Jenkins, 63, a parish priest in this western English town, suffered a massive stroke last Saturday and doctors had ruled out any chance of recovery as he lay in a coma in the city's county hospital.

But he is now walking, talking and eating after his assistant, father Anthony Tumulty, took the hand, known as the Kemble Hand, from the Alter at St Francis Xavier's Church here to the hospital.

He removed it from the oak casket and placed it on Jenkins' forehead, as the priest lay in a deep coma. Jenkins' recovery began from that moment, according to Tumulty.

## Chirac not disappointed at outcome of London confce

YAMOOUSSOUKRO (Ivory Coast), July 22: French President Jacques Chirac, who had wanted to send more troops to Bosnia, said he was not disappointed by the compromise reached in London provided the western allies did what they promised, reports Reuters.

"This conference is not disappointing because it has been clearly affirmed that the populations will be defended," he told reporters on a visit to Ivory Coast on Friday.

Western allies met in London on Friday for talks aimed at saving the crumbling UN mission and preventing further attacks on so-called "safe areas."

British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind said the 16-nation meeting had agreed

there would be a "substantial and decisive response" if the Serbs attacked the Muslim enclave of Gorazde and the measures would be taken to help get supplies into the Bosnian capital Sarajevo.

"France thought the most effective means was a ground-type defence ... and the Americans imagined the best response was air strikes," Chirac said.

"What was decided was to create a combination of the two. This means the red line we wanted was clearly drawn. If it is crossed, the necessary means would be put in place, notably air strikes ... and failing that ground-based means as we proposed."

France and the United States have been divided over action to defend the "safe areas" of Gorazde and Sarajevo.

## Mubarak for OIC summit on Bosnia

CAIRO, July 22: An Islamic summit should be held to take "firm decisions and measures" over the Bosnian crisis, President Hosni Mubarak said today, reports AFP.

Mubarak told the government daily Al-Ahram that Muslim countries should press for a rapid intervention in Bosnia.

"An OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) summit should be held if necessary so that the world understands that there is an Islamic front capable of taking firm decisions and measures."



Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic waves as he leaves after a meeting with the mayor of Tuzla on Friday. Izetbegovic yesterday called for airstrikes to protect UN 'safe areas'. Others are unidentified. — AFP/UNB photo

## Jordan winds up telethon for Bosnia after collecting \$7m

AMMAN, July 22: Jordan wound up a telethon and nationwide solidarity campaign for Bosnia at dawn today after collecting seven million dollars, including 3,000 dollars from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, reports AFP.

The telethon, opened by King Hussein with a 70,000 dollar donation on Friday, was flooded with so many calls from all over the Middle East it was extended until dawn to take their pledges of cash and other aid.

Calls came in offering support for Bosnia's war-ravaged Muslims from Saudis, Kuwaitis, people in the United Arab Emirates, Sudanese, Syrians, Iranians as well as Jordanians.

The largest contribution came from a Saudi tycoon who offered a mobile television transmission station worth 700,000 dollars. Another donor from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, offered 300,000 dollars in cash.

Most donors from Arab and Islamic countries also

offered to fight a Jihad (holy war) in support of the Bosnian people.

King Hussein, whose government has 2,200 UN peacekeepers stationed in former Yugoslavia, offered to go himself.

"What is going to in Bosnia is a catastrophe. If the world opted to move and stop the massacres, we are ready to send more troops, and I am personally ready to go with them," he told the nation.

"But if there is no move, we will not keep our soldiers in the light of this farce and tragedy."

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, whose government has agreed to coordinate in aid effort to Bosnia with Jordan, also rang the telethon. "I will give you 3,000 dollars," he said.

The two countries will send two planes next week full of relief aid to Bosnia.

Coky Yahya Runasia was sentenced Friday by the district court in Bandung, the capital of West Java about 180 kilometres (112 miles) southeast of Jakarta, the daily Merdeka reported.

30-month jail for defaming Suharto

JAKARTA, July 22: After a trial marred by an egg-throwing incident, a district court has sentenced a man to 30 months in prison for defaming President Suharto, reports AP.

Merdeka reported.



A Dutch archaeologist examines skeletons found on Friday in Beirut during excavation works to build a new tunnel to alleviate traffic jams. A Dutch team found a Roman-Byzantine cemetery, dating back to between the 3rd and 4th century BC. Archaeologists have already found seven graves with adult and infant bones, as well as three sculpted but empty sarcophagi, one of which is in marble. — AFP/UNB photo