

BRIEFLY



Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati in a press conference on Tuesday in Tehran says Iran is determined to send arms and other military supplies to Bosnian Muslims to enable them to defend themselves against Serb aggression. Velayati said Bosnian leaders stressed their need for heavy weaponry in a bid to counter the shelling of Bosnian cities by Serb forces, when he met them Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

Rabin opens road in Jericho: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin opened a 10-million dollar road Tuesday which allows Israelis to keep out of the self-rule enclave of Jericho when they travel through the Jordan valley. AFP reports from West Bank.

This new road will ensure relative security for those who chose to take it, Rabin said as he cut the ribbon near the Jewish settlement of Beit Aravah, on the southern edge of the autonomous zone.

It took more than a year to complete the 16-kilometre stretch around the eastern side of the West Bank oases, although a track had been open since autonomy began in May 1994.

Rebels kill 5 in Agartala: At least five persons were killed and three others injured when a group of underground insurgents attacked a remote village of Monacherra under Fatkroy police station in north Tripura district early Tuesday. PTI reports from Agartala.

According to police here, the armed extremist group numbering about eight raided the village at around 0600 hours Tuesday and attacked some houses by opening fire, in which three were killed on the spot while two others succumbed to injuries on way to hospital.

Flood claims 20 in China: Rain-swollen rivers overflowed their banks in northeastern China, killing at least 20 people and stranding hundreds of thousands others, media reports said Wednesday. AP reports from Beijing.

A week of torrential rains has caused the worst flooding in a half century along many rivers in Liaoning and Jilin provinces, and forecasters expect more bad weather.

Along the Hun river, which runs past several major cities in Liaoning, flooding is the worst since 1888, the China Youth Daily reported. The Hun breached a dam, submerging dozens of towns and villages in one vast body of water, the People's Daily said.

Beijing curbs canines: China's capital put the bite on dog owners starting Tuesday. A new law look effect banning breeds taller than 35 centimetres (13 3/4 inches) and imposing registration fees on the dogs that make the cut. AP reports from Beijing.

Dog owning, effectively banned as bourgeois 20 years ago, has boomed along with the growth of China's economy. The capital's pooch population has gone from nearly nil to more than 213,200 as of May 1, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Tuesday.

3 rearrested in Myanmar: Three Myanmar pro-democracy leaders who had already been imprisoned were arrested again by the military government during June and sentenced to seven-year terms. Amnesty International said in a statement seen Wednesday. AP reports from Bangkok.

They were sentenced after a summary trial that may not have conformed to international standards, said the Amnesty International statement received in Bangkok.

The organisation had no details about what the activists were charged with, but noted that they were arrested after regularly meeting with foreigners.

Bus mishap claims 27 in Mexico: Two buses collided on a central Mexican highway Tuesday, killing at least 27 people and injuring 29, the government news agency Notimex reported. AP reports from Matehuala, Mexico.

The collision occurred near Matehuala in the state of San Luis Potosi, about 300 miles (480 kilometres) north of Mexico City.

73 rescued from Baltic Sea: Seventy-three Afghan and Sri Lankan boat people were rescued early Tuesday after being found drifting in four dinghies in the Baltic Sea. AP reports from Denmark.

A Norwegian-owned freighter ship picked up the exhausted refugees, including 11 babies, who were reported in good shape.

Deputy Police Chief Jens Henrik Hoelbjerg from the national police said it was "probably human smuggling which we believe originates from the Baltic countries."

Ceasefire ordered in Chechnya: Russian and Chechen military commanders meeting in Grozny have ordered their forces to observe a ceasefire throughout Chechnya as of midnight Tuesday. Russian television reported. AFP reports from Moscow.

A truce has theoretically been in effect since June 18, but it has been violated repeatedly, with each side saying the other opened fire first.

Serbs vow action against Croat intervention in Balkan war

KNIN (Croatia), Aug 2: Rebel Serb leaders from Bosnia and Croatia have promised to act together against Croatia's intervention in the Bosnian war, which threatens to merge the conflicts in the two states, reports AP.

The move followed a wary decision by Croatia's rebel Serbs and the Croatian government to hold talks in Geneva on Thursday. Even as they agreed to negotiate, attacks continued, and both sides readied for possible battle.

In Washington, on Tuesday, the US House of Representatives followed the Senate by voting to lift the UN arms embargo against Bosnia so the Muslim-led government could better defend itself. President Clinton has vowed to veto the measure, saying it would force

UN peacekeepers to leave Bosnia — and lead to the introduction of American ground troops to help in the evacuation.

NATO meanwhile expanded its threat of airstrikes on Bosnian Serbs if they threaten or attack the remaining four UN "safe areas" in Bosnia.

A wide range of military targets could come under broad, repeated air attack if the Bosnian Serbs move on the northwestern enclave of Bihac, Tuzla, Sarajevo or the eastern region of Gorazde, the western alliance said in Brussels, Belgium.

The commander of UN forces in former Yugoslavia, Gen. Bernard Janvier, and US Adm. Leighton Smith, who oversees NATO monitoring of Bosnia's no-fly zone, were to meet in Zagreb, Croatia Wednesday to discuss the

possible air raids. As the threat of wider war loomed, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic — widely blamed for instigating the Balkan conflicts — made an unusual appeal to Bosnia's Muslim president and the Bosnian rebel Serb military commander to make peace.

Milosevic, who is now playing peacemaker to try and end three-year international sanctions on his country, warned Bosnian Serb Gen. Ratko Mladic there was a danger of "hitherto-unseen escalation of the conflict."

He told Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic he was ready "to do everything so that the solution be reached, with joint effort, as soon as possible."

Tensions exploded last week when Croatia sent thousands of troops flooding into western Bosnia, where

they made stunning advances on the rebel Serbs. Croatia said it was responding to a plea for help from Bosnia's Muslim-led government to defend the "safe area" of Bihac in northwestern Bosnia. So far, Croatia has used the advance to move its forces through Bosnia to threaten Knin, the self-proclaimed rebel Serb capital just across the border in Croatia.

Rebel Serb political and military leaders from Bosnia and Croatia, including Mladic, met in the Serb-held Bosnian town of Drvar, just 25 kilometres (12 miles) north of the Croatian troops in Bosnia.

"We discussed how to confront this aggression jointly," said Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic after five hours of talks. He refused to elaborate.

Chinese FM pays sudden visit to Hong Kong

HONG KONG, Aug 2: Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen fleetingly visited Hong Kong on Wednesday, although Chinese officials in the colony were tight-lipped about the purpose of the trip, reports AP.

"He's passing through for just over two hours before heading back to Beijing. We'll eat and chat," Zhou Nan, China's top official in Hong Kong, told reporters.

"I don't know what he wants to talk about," said Zhou, who heads the Xinhua News Agency, China's de facto embassy in the British colony.

Xinhua's propaganda department said it had not been notified of the visit.

Qian may have been preparing for a trip to London in October when Hong Kong issues are expected to be high on the agenda. China recovers Hong Kong from Britain in 1997.

Qian's decision to visit London was seen as an important sign that Anglo-Chinese relations on Hong Kong are warming after three years of acrimony over political reforms introduced by Chris Patten, the colony's British governor.

US maintains major military presence in Gulf

N THE GULF, Aug 2: Five years after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, US warplanes still catapult off the flight deck of this aircraft carrier to patrol the skies above the Gulf, reports AP.

"We keep our guard up," Rear Adm. Robert M. Nutwell, told The Associated Press in an interview Monday aboard the Lincoln. But, he added, "right now, things are pretty stable."

While there's no immediate crisis in the Gulf, none of the region's major disputes have been resolved. Saddam Hussein still strictly rules Iraq, though international sanctions have been strangling the economy.

In an apparent bid for sanctions relief, Saddam has made conciliatory gestures recently, including the announcement of an amnesty for the country's political prisoners.

But the official Iraqi news agency announced Tuesday that "The Mother of All Battles" radio station would start broadcasting Wednesday, the fifth anniversary of the Aug. 2, 1990, invasion of Kuwait.

In the United States, President Clinton has developed a policy of "dual containment" that involves isolating and closely monitoring developments in both Iraq and Iran, which are branded outlaw nations by Washington.



US President Bill Clinton (C) poses with astronauts from the crew of the Space Shuttle Atlantis and the Russian Space Station Mir after being presented with a plaque during ceremonies in the Oval office at the White House in Washington, DC on Tuesday. Standing with Clinton, from the left are US astronaut Norm Thagard, mission specialist, Russian Cosmonaut Guennadi Streklov (2nd-L), and US astronauts Charles Precourt (3rd-R), pilot of Atlantis, Ellen Baker (2nd-R), mission specialist, and Robert "Hoot" Gibson (R), Commander of the Shuttle Atlantis. — AFP/UNB photo.

Lanka plans drafting all youths into military service

(COLOMBO), Aug 2: For the first time in Sri Lanka's 12-year civil war, the government is considering drafting young men into the army to fight Tamil separatists, a state-run newspaper said Wednesday, reports AP.

"All able-bodied youths over 18 years may be drafted into military service if the 12-year war is prolonged," the Daily News quoted Mangala Samaraweera, the telecommunications minister, as saying.

Samaraweera heads the "White Lotus" Movement, a state project to raise funds for the war effort.

The 110,000-strong military has stepped up fresh recruitment since the fighting resumed in April after a

three-month truce. More than 660 soldiers have been killed since then.

The government plans to unveil a peace package later this week to end the 12-year war. It plans to turn Sri Lanka into a federation of eight regions, including a Tamil dominated region, each with wide powers to rule itself.

The package has won support from political leaders of the country's three ethnic groups — the majority Sinhalese, the Tamils and the small Muslim community.

But it is being opposed by hard-line ethnic Sinhalese, with Sri Lanka's top Buddhist monks leading the way.

Tamils, who form 18 per cent of the country's 17 mil-

lion population, are mostly Hindus.

Those who say that peace proposals should be presented only after the war is won should be prepared to send their sons and daughters to the front," said Samaraweera at a seminar organised by the government in Colombo on Tuesday to garner people's support for the peace package.

The separatists have been fighting for a homeland in the north and east for minority Tamils since 1983. They allege widespread discrimination by the Sinhalese majority, which controls the government and military.

More than 35,000 people have been killed.

India claims Pak hand in regional terrorism

NEW DELHI, Aug 2: India has clearly told the United States that Pakistan is supporting and supplementing terrorism not only in Kashmir but in other countries also and supply of sophisticated arms even then to that country would create "serious power imbalance", according to External Affairs Minister. Pranab Mukherjee reports PTI.

"We have told the United States that its assessment that Pakistan was a moderate state was not correct," Mukherjee told PTI Tuesday.

He said kidnapping of four foreign nationals by mercenary group in Jammu and Kashmir and directions given to them from across the border had once again clearly borne out Pakistan complicity in terrorism in Kashmir.

The External Affairs Minister said India was for better relations with Pakistan, but arming of Pakistan with sophisticated and lethal wea-

pons by United States and China would cloud these relations. "For what are they (Pakistan) buying arms? Who is their target?" Pranab Mukherjee raised the queries and answered by saying that for last 47 years, India had been the only target against whom these arms had been used.

On the hostages issue, the external affairs minister said India was constantly in touch with different countries to exert international pressure to see that they were released unharmed.

He ruled out security operations to rescue the hostages saying that nothing should be done to jeopardise the security of the hostages.

In the course of the interview the external affairs minister touched upon on all major issues confronting India's relations with other countries including China, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Off the Record

Tale of a dethroned pageant

ROANOKE, Virginia: Miss Virginia was dethroned Thursday after mysterious "new facts" compounded a scandal that began when she was caught embellishing her resume, reports AP.

"We're taking her crown," said pageant spokesman Bud Oakey.

Neither pageant officials nor Andrea Ballengee would discuss the information that prompted the move. But a WDBF-TV reported that pageant officials had learned that Miss Ballengee, who had billed herself as a first-year law student, had not been accepted to the University of Miami Law School.

Oakey would not comment on that report. When the pageant asked Miss Ballengee to resign, she refused. The Miss Virginia Scholarship Pageant Board then voted unanimously to terminate her title and take away her crown, as well as a car and apartment loaned to her for a year. She gets to keep a 7,500 dollar "non-forfeitable" scholarship.

New facts have come to the board's attention," said Robert Bennett, president of the pageant. The board's action was taken to protect the dignity and honour of the Miss Virginia pageant.

David is now legally decent

HONG KONG: It's official: Michelangelo's David is decent after all, reports AP.

Hong Kong High Court judge Jim Findlay quashed a ruling by the colony's Obscene Articles Tribunal that a photo of the nude statue published in the Eastern Express was indecent, the newspaper said Wednesday.

US lawyer Gerard McCoy had argued that Hong Kong risked becoming "the laughing stock of the world" if Findlay upheld last December's ruling.

On Tuesday, Findlay said David is "a magnificent example of renaissance art. I have never, until now, heard any sensible person suggest that it is indecent," the newspaper said.

It said Findlay criticised the government-appointed censorship body for falling in its duties, ordered it to reclassify the ruling and pay Eastern Express' appeal costs.

The newspaper printed David's photo as part of an advertisement for an art gallery. It said it faced a 200,000 Hong Kong dollar (US \$25,906) fine and imprisonment for its journalists if Findlay rejected its appeal.

The tribunal already faced criticism for ruling "New Man" a bronze nude by British sculptress Dame Elisabeth Frink, too indecent to be displayed outside of an art gallery.

A properly firm which used the statue to decorate its office lobby in central Hong Kong covered the "indecent" part with a leaf cut from cardboard.

Russia accuses Dudayev of violating accord

MOSCOW, Aug 2: Russia's top negotiator in peace talks with Chechnya on Wednesday accused rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev of violating the terms of a military agreement aimed at ending nearly eight months of war, reports AP.

Dudayev's decision to dismiss the lead Chechen negotiator, Usman Imayev, broke an agreement on the participants in the talks, the ITAR-Tass news agency quoted Russian mediator Vyacheslav Mikhailov as saying.

"Usman Imayev tended to compromise during negotiations, while Dzhokhar Dudayev fears sober-minded politicians," Mikhailov told ITAR-Tass.

Dudayev relieved Imayev of his duties Monday for "betrayal of the interests of the people" of Chechnya, a day after Russian and Che-

chen negotiators had reached a military agreement after lengthy talks.

Imayev had been accused by some Chechen field commanders and negotiators of making too many compromises. His successor will be Dudayev's education minister, Khozhakhmed Yerikhanov, Russian news reports said.

Mikhailov said new consultations would have to be held on the change in Chechnya's negotiating team. Talks on political issues were to have begun Thursday in the Chechen capital, Grozny, and it was not clear if Imayev's dismissal would lead to any delay.

Chechen commander-in-chief Gen. Aslan Maskhadov was quoted by the ITAR-Tass news agency as ordering rebel fighters to halt military action as of midnight but fighting continued.

'Politics in India a dirty business'

NEW DELHI, Aug 2: Politics in India is a dirty business, pervaded by crime syndicates and thugs, said a report released in Parliament Tuesday, reports AP.

Couched in generalities, the published report named no party and did not try to quantify the extent of the underworld's influence in politics.

It said crime syndicates had penetrated the political system and government with "the muscle and money power... to be able to operate with impunity."

The report said: "Warning signals of sinister links between the underworld, politicians and the bureaucracy have been evident with disturbing regularity."

Japan's WW II defeat marked freedom for many Asian nations

SEOUL, Aug 2: For Japan, it was a day of defeat. But to much of Asia, the date of Japan's World War II surrender — August 15 — marked liberation from often-brutal Japanese rule, reports AP.

In an effort to wipe away the lingering pain of foreign dominance, commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the war's end are gearing up as celebrations of independence.

For many who lived through their countries' darkest hours, it will be a time to recall the price that was paid for freedom and today's economic success.

"Some memories are very bitter, but I want the younger generation to know how the older generation suffered through the war and not to

take Singapore's prosperity for granted," said Lee Liang Hye, a 71-year-old war survivor.

For others, the goal is to exorcise old ghosts: South Korea's key event will be the start of demolition on the biggest symbol of Japanese imperialism, the headquarters for the colonial administration that now serves as the national museum.

Taiwan will issue commemorative stamps and hold photo exhibitions. Aging generals and other war veterans will attend meetings to recount details of the war.

In Hong Kong, more than 400 veterans from Britain, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand are expected for commemorative

activities that will be attended by Lt. Gen. Sir Michael Rose, the former UN commander in Bosnia.

Most of the festivities will be August 15, although Indonesia's will be held two days later. Unlike the other countries, which were colonised by Japan, Jakarta is marking the end of Dutch rule.

Singapore will be marking a dual holiday: the end of World War II and the 30th anniversary of independence from Britain.

Japan also marks August 15, although the annual ceremony in central Tokyo is a somber occasion. Weeks before the anniversary date, the government was still wrangling about how to commemorate it. Every year, the an-

niversary is observed with prayers for war dead.

Perhaps no other country will match the fervor of South Korea's ceremonies. Although relations with Japan have improved in recent years, sentiment still runs strong over its 1910-45 colonial rule, when books were burned, the Korean language forbidden, and tens of thousand enslaved in labour camps and brothels.

The Education Broadcasting System has planned series of programs on the subject, including an animated series on how the Japanese subverted South Korean folk tales.

Various religious groups have joined forces in a signature campaign to demand

compensation for sex slaves and other war victims.

The government is planning a huge, colourful ceremony August 15 in front of the museum, one of the most visible buildings in Seoul, at the end of a wide downtown boulevard. The blue-topped dome will be taken off to mark the beginning of the demolition.

SBS-TV plans to release 400 pigeons from four corners of the country that morning. They are supposed to arrive in Seoul later in the day.

Local governments are planning historical exhibits, photo displays, concerts and other activities. Religious, literary, cultural and student groups also are scheduling events.



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (2nd-R) greets King Hussein of Jordan (R) accompanied by Queen Noor (L) and Mrs Mubarak at the Alexandria Airport on Tuesday. The two leaders discussed ways to improve relations between the Arab countries and the peace process in Middle East. — AFP/UNB photo.

Lanka committed to solve Tamil conflict: FM

ISLAMABAD, Aug 1: Sri Lanka is purchasing arms from different friendly countries but remains firmly committed to a political solution of the Tamil conflict, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister said here today, reports AFP.

"The government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga is totally, uncompromisingly committed to a negotiated settlement," Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told a news conference during a four-day visit here.

Kadirgamar said a constitutional package to be unveiled by President Chandrika Kumaratunga would contain "far-reaching proposals