

BRIEFLY



A teacher comforts terrified pupils of Cordoba school after a group of Jewish settlers entered school to remove the Palestinian flag in front of Beit Hadassa settlement in the centre of Hebron city in the occupied West Bank Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

44 jailed for attacks on Sikhs: A court in New Delhi has sentenced 44 people to prison for attacks on members of the Sikh community following the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two Sikh bodyguards in 1984. AFP reports from New Delhi.

A court in the eastern district of Kakardooma imposed six-month prison terms and fines on 43 men and a two-year sentence on another for rioting, looting, murder and arson yesterday. Prosecutors opposed a plea by the defence for leniency.

Referendum in Iraq Oct 15: Iraq's first referendum to reelect Saddam Hussein as president for another seven years will be held on October 15, the official news agency INA said Wednesday. AFP reports from Baghdad.

The agency cited a presidential decree fixing the date for the referendum, following parliament's approval Sunday of Saddam as the sole candidate.

Rabin arrives in Moscow: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin arrived in Moscow on Wednesday for talks expected to focus on Russia's plans to sell nuclear reactors to Iran. Reuter reports from Moscow. Rabin, who flew in from Kiev following talks with Ukrainian leaders, was due to meet Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and Defence Minister Pavel Grachev yesterday.

HK population growth rate up: The population of Hong Kong, already one of the world's most crowded cities, reached an estimated 6,189,800 at the end of June, a jump of 128,400 people, or 2.1 per cent over June 1994, the government said Thursday. AP reports from Hong Kong. There were 41,100 more births than deaths between mid-1994 and mid-1995, accounting for 32 per cent of the population growth, a government statement said. In the same period, there was also a net inflow of 87,300 people into the colony, the statement said.

AL asks Libya to stop expulsion: The Arab League asked Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi on Wednesday to suspend the expulsion of the 30,000 Palestinians resident in Libya. Reuter reports from Cairo. Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid telephoned Gaddafi with the request after talks earlier on Wednesday with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, an Arab League source said.

Lanka tries to curb HR abuses: The government brought in a law Thursday that bars police and the military from detaining suspects for more than 24 hours without notifying senior officers. AP reports from Colombo. Violators face up to two years in jail under the law that the government brought using special emergency powers. Parliament must approve it in a month. Human rights activists have repeatedly expressed concern over the disappearance of minority Tamils while in police custody, extra-judicial executions and arbitrary arrests.

4 killed in gunbattle in Tripura: Three Indian paramilitary troopers and a tribal militant died in a gunbattle in the eastern state of Tripura yesterday, the Press Trust of India said. AFP reports from New Delhi. Officials in the state capital Agartala said the firefight, triggered by an attempt to ambush a paramilitary patrol, lasted about 30 minutes.

Talbott arrives in Moscow: US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott arrived in Moscow yesterday for talks intended to heal a rift with Russia over NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serbs. Reuter reports from Moscow. US Embassy officials said he was expected to meet Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and other Foreign Ministry officials, but said he had no meetings scheduled with President Boris Yeltsin or Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

Iran begins war games: Iranian Revolutionary Guards have launched amphibious military exercises on the Caspian coast, Iran's news agency IRNA said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Nicosia. It said guards' units, including an airborne division, "displayed their fighting process in the exercises" held in coastal waters near Chalus and Nowshahr ports. The war games aim to "test the combat readiness of the forces," the agency said.

2000 Iraqi children begging: Some 2,000 Iraqi boys and girls are begging in the streets, the UN Children's Fund said Wednesday. AFP reports from Geneva. The next stage is delinquency, UNICEF delegate Das Gupta Subhash warned at a press conference. At least "nobody is sleeping on the pavement — yet," he added.

Murayama ends KSA visit: Japanese Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama ended his visit to Saudi Arabia yesterday and flew to Egypt, the second leg of a Middle East tour, diplomats said. Reuter reports from Jeddah. The Japanese diplomats said Murayama did not sign any agreements during his Saudi visit, but both countries agreed to boost their economic cooperation. Murayama held talks with Saudi King Fahd shortly after his arrival on Tuesday.

Quake shakes Siberia: An earthquake measuring four to six on the Richter scale shook the southwest Kemerovo region of Siberia in Russia's Far East yesterday, the Ministry for Emergency Situations reported. AFP says from Moscow.

All domestic flights suspended
Chandrika fails to turn up for confce amid fears of attack

COLOMBO, Sept 14: President Chandrika Kumaratunga today failed to turn up for a key conference on social development here amid fears that Tamil rebels planned to assassinate her, officials and defence sources said, reports AFP.

Kumaratunga, who is known for her lack of punctuality at important public meetings, was due at the National Conference on Social Development here but did not turn up. She was to deliver the key-note address.

The government information Department gave no reason for her decision to skip the meeting but defence sources cited security considerations for the last-

minute decision. Police have uncovered plans by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to assassinate Kumaratunga following the arrest of several Tiger suspects in the capital in the past month, officials said.

AP adds: The government has suspended all domestic commercial flights following fears that Tamil rebels would hijack an aircraft and bomb the capital, officials said Thursday.

"Domestic flights have been suspended since Wednesday until further notice," said HMC Nimalisiri, assistant director Department of Civil Aviation.

Nine private domestic air-

lines operate from the Ratmalana airfield in the city's southern suburb, flying foreigners and locals to tourists destinations in the country.

Some flying schools operate planes and helicopters from the airfield, about 15 kilometres (9 miles) from downtown. It is also used by the air force, which guards it.

Nimalisiri said the government would review the situation at the next security council meeting, which is chaired by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, before a decision is taken to lift the ban.

Police this week uncovered a plot by the rebels to hijack or hire a private air-

craft and bomb a building in the capital, probably the parliament. The information was obtained from rebel suspects arrested in the capital.

Another AFP report adds: Tamil Tiger rebels today remained silent on the crash of an air force transport plane off Sri Lanka's western coast, killing all 75 people on board, Tamil sources said.

The clandestine radio of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) merely broadcast state media reports of Wednesday's crash of the Antonov transporter without any comment, Tamil sources, who monitored the radio, said.

PLO-Israel to sign autonomy deal on Sept 21

JERUSALEM, Sept 14: Arrangements have been made to sign an Israel-PLO autonomy agreement in a White House ceremony September 21, even though negotiators have yet to resolve key issues, Israeli reports said Thursday, reports AP.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's bureau already ordered a special air force plane to fly the Israeli leader and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to Washington, the reports said.

Officials in Rabin's office had no immediate comment. Israel and the PLO have been negotiating for months to try and reach agreement on Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank, including an Israeli troop pullback and Palestinian elections.

Algerian forces kill 24 militants

PARIS, Sept 14: Algerian security forces killed 24 Muslim guerrillas in operations carried out in 10 regions across Algeria, the official Algerian news agency APS said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

APS, quoting an official security statement, said the 24 were all killed outside the capital, Algiers, between Saturday and Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the security forces announced that they had also killed 14 guerrillas when their men stormed a house in Algiers's Djebel Koukou suburb, overlooking the militant stronghold of Bab el-Oued in the centre of the Mediterranean city.

Pak govt for neutral police force

ISLAMABAD, Sept 14: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said today her government would consider reforming the country's police in order to have a politically neutral police force, reports AFP.

It has been a common complaint in the country that police have been used as a political instrument under successive governments to further interests of influential people. Provinces control bulk of the police force.

Benazir quoted by the official Association Press of Pakistan (APP) news agency, said the government would consider any proposal which helps to have a "politically neutral and democratically-controlled police force."

In a message to a passing-out parade at a police college, she said a commission made up of senior officials from police and the ministries of interior and justice would be set up to recommend reforms within three months.

Lankan police raid 6 newspaper offices in a week

COLOMBO, Sept 14: Police searched a sixth newspaper office in a week and questioned journalists about publishing articles critical of the government, journalists said Thursday, reports AP.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has accused the press of misusing its freedom and said she won't allow it to behave like "a wild ass."

Detectives armed with a search warrant issued by a court searched the office of the tabloid weekly "Yugaya Jana Handa" for three hours Wednesday, looking for pictures of President Chandrika Kumaratunga they believe is defamatory.

The police said they had received information that the photograph was to be published in the Sinhala-language tabloid's main issue Friday, a journalist said.



From L to R Prime Minister Paul Keating of Australia, Jim Bolger of New Zealand, Sir Julius Cham of Papua New Guinea and Baron Vaea of Tonga lead delegates from 12 other Pacific nations to the venue of the 26th South Pacific Forum retreat near Madang Thursday. Strengthening the international condemnation of renewed French nuclear testing at Mururoa Atoll will dominate the annual summit of island leaders. — AFP/UNB photo

Democracy enters a new phase in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Sept 14: For all its poverty and backwardness, Nepal is often praised for the way it has handled democracy since it switched from an absolute monarch to a parliament in 1991, reports AP.

All four of its prime ministers have been activists who had risked their lives and served prison sentences while leading the country's pro-democracy movement in 1990.

And even though Nepal's two main political parties are sharply divided philosophically, they have so far allowed legislators and the electorate to choose between them.

"For a new democracy,

Nepal has done a good job," said Joe Manickavasagam, the World Bank director in Nepal.

"It even appears to be learning by trial and error in the important area of economic development. If Nepal goes on like this, the future looks good," he said in an interview.

Last weekend, Nepal dropped a nine-month experiment with a Communist government promoting populism and gave a centrist party that favors free-market economic reforms a second chance.

On Thursday, the new prime minister, 49-year-old Sher Bahadur Deuba, said his Nepali Congress Party would

try to work with the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist).

But Deuba also issued a warning to all bureaucrats loyal to the previous Communist government: support his economic reforms or face possible dismissal.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Deuba said his predecessor, Prime Minister Manmohan Adhikari, had risked bankrupting Nepal by introducing populist programs to win votes.

"My biggest challenge will be to bring the economy back onto the right track by reintroducing the economic liberalization policies of my party," Deuba said in his office.



A Bosnian government soldier flashes the V-sign as he along with some comrades arrives on a truck in Butmir, outside Sarajevo Wednesday. Bosnia's President Izetbegovic congratulated his troops on their recent battlefield success, achieved during recent NATO bombing of the Bosnian Serb positions around the Bosnian capital. — AFP/UNB photo

Cabinet reshuffle strengthens Rao's hold on Congress

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao has strengthened his hold on the ruling Congress Party with a big cabinet expansion aimed at improving his electoral chances next year, newspapers said today, reports Reuter.

But they agreed that his apparent failure to persuade some senior ministers to step down to do party organizational work was a sign of weakness.

Rao brought 15 new second-tier ministers into his government on Wednesday, and four more were to be inducted before the end of the week.

Newspapers said the prime minister had an eye on general elections due by mid-1996 as he placated youthful loyalists, accommodated the widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and brought regional and religious balance to his already large cabinet.

The long-awaited reshuffle which finally took place

three months after Rao promised it is essentially a political exercise. The Indian Express said.

The exercise is more political and party management than a last-ditch effort at making the government deliver. The Times of India said.

Rao tapped three Muslims, raising to eight the number in his cabinet which now numbers nearly 70 senior and junior ministers.

He also built a bridge to Rajiv Gandhi's widow, Sonia, by bringing in S S Ahluwalia, who was close to her husband, while Sonia Gandhi has no formal political role, she wields considerable influence in the ruling party and Congress dissidents have been angling for her support.

"The foremost purpose served by the latest round of changes in the union council of ministers is to show who is the boss within the ruling party and the government," the Economic Times said.

If there are any more

Off the Record

70m-year-old fossil

LONDON: French scientists reported on Thursday they had found a 70 million-year-old fossil belonging to a bird that may have been as big as the modern ostrich, reports Reuter.

And they said some fossil eggs, found in southern France and previously assigned to dinosaurs, could actually be bird eggs.

In a letter to the weekly magazine Nature, the four scientists said the fossil was part of a bird's pelvis. "Although the proportions of the complete skeleton cannot be reconstructed, there is no doubt that it was indeed large," they said.

The scientists, from Paris, Vitrolles and France's dinosaur museum, suggested a possible rethink over the discovery of hundreds of thousands of fossilised dinosaur eggs.

"The assumption that all those eggs are dinosaur eggs should be treated with caution," they wrote.

Reports of a huge nest full of dinosaur eggs in the southern Pyrenees mountains were carried in nature last month.

Settlement of unusual mistake

NAPLES, Italy: A fertility doctor Wednesday settled a lawsuit brought by parents who charged he impregnated the mother with the sperm of a stranger rather than the father, reports AP.

The girl born from the procedure, Giada Minucci, suffers from thalassaemia, a congenital form of anemia which she could not have caught from her parents.

The doctor, Raffaele Magli, agreed to pay the parents 1 billion lire (620,00 dollars) in exchange for their dropping the suit.

Magli was indicted criminally in the case. Prosecutors also alleged he may have created "hundreds or thousands" of half-siblings by using sperm from only two donors in his practice.

He was charged with fraud and aggravated personal injury.

The father of Giada, who was conceived five years ago, said they accepted the settlement to pay for her care.

"We did it in the interests of the girl," said Roberto Minucci, according to the ANSA and AGI news agencies.

Magli had contended that the mother, Maria Cristina, was impregnated in an extra-marital affair.

The case became symbolic of Italy's lack of laws regulating medically assisted pregnancies.

Russia withdraws 8000 troops from Chechnya

MOSCOW, Sept 14: Russia said on Wednesday it had pulled 8,000 servicemen out of Chechnya under a military agreement but accused rebel Chechen forces of disarming too slowly under the deal, reports Reuter.

Anatoly Romanov, Commander of Russian troops in Chechnya, was quoted by Interfax news agency as saying the 8,000 troops had withdrawn from the southern region with their equipment over the past five days.

But Oleg Lobov, President Boris Yeltsin's special envoy to Chechnya, said he was unhappy with the pace at which separatist fighters were handing over their weapons and that "new approaches" to the disarmament procedures were needed.

His comments were a further sign of the difficulties in implementing the military accord signed on July 30 and the lack of trust between the two sides.

Lobov later travelled to the Black Sea resort of Sochi, where Yeltsin is on holiday, and briefed the president on his more than week-long visit to Chechnya.

China protests Clinton's meeting with Dalai Lama

BEIJING, Sept 14: China summoned the top US Embassy official Thursday to lodge a strong protest over a White House meeting between the Dalai Lama and President Clinton, reports AP.

Vice Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing summoned Scott Hallford, the highest ranking official at the embassy while the ambassador's post is vacant following the reassignment of Stapleton Roy.

Li told Hallford China blamed the United States for "connivance with and support to Dalai's clamor for the independence of Tibet," Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian said.

The meeting is a "gross interference in China's internal affairs," Chen added.

Clinton dropped by briefly as the Dalai Lama met with Vice President Al Gore at the White House Wednesday. The meeting was low-key, apparently in efforts to avoid further strains in US-China relations.

China demanded that the United States stop taking actions that "hurt the feelings of the Chinese people and undermine bilateral relations," Chen said.

China sees Tibet as part of its territory, while many Tibetans claim they have enjoyed de facto independence for centuries.

Security tightened in Srinagar

SRINAGAR, Sept 14: A tight security was imposed in Srinagar following intelligence reports that Kashmir militants could launch fresh attacks on the state capital to dramatise their secessionist campaign, officials said Thursday, reports AP.

The steps came against the backdrop of a sharp rise in terrorist attacks in Srinagar, summer capital of Jammu Kashmir state and seat of the Muslim insurrection.

The rebels have been fighting government soldiers for five years, claiming discrimination by the federal government. Some of them want Kashmir to become independent while the others want it to join with Pakistan.

The Indian government is also trying desperately to persuade the Al-Farans guerrillas to free the four Western hostages before it gets cold in the Himalayas in a month.

We know that the hostages are safe, but we also know that they are living in a very difficult situation," said government spokesman Kulb-

husan Jandiayal.

"We are making all attempts to seek their release through negotiations... We are in daily contact with the kidnapers," Jandiayal said Thursday. He would not elaborate.

But he said officials are worried that the cold spell will begin soon in the mountain passes, 14,000 feet high, where the hostages are being held.

The kidnapers have not asked us for any warm clothes for the captives. If they want, we will surely arrange," Jandiayal said.

The guerrillas kidnapped six Westerners in July. One of them escaped, another was killed.

Al-Farans has threatened to kill the four others if the government does not release 15 jailed militants. India has refused to do that.

The hostages are: Donald Hutchings, 42, of Spokane, Washington; Keith Mangan, 33, of Middlesbrough, England; Paul Wells, 23, of London; and Dirk Hasert, 26, of Erfurt, Germany.