

BRIEFLY



Pope John Paul II carries a cross decorated with an olive branch as he meets Catholics to celebrate the Palm Sunday ceremonies on St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sunday.

Chun, Roh's trial resumes: Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woon returned to court Monday, with prosecutors accusing the former military strongmen of using martial law to cement their bloody rise to power 16 years ago, AP reports from Seoul.

Since early March, Chun and Roh have appeared in court together each Monday on mutiny and treason charges. Their combined rule from 1980 to 1993 covered one of South Korea's most turbulent periods.

Peres leaves for Oman, Qatar: Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres left Tel Aviv yesterday on a historic trip to Oman and Qatar heading up a high-powered trade delegation, his office said, AFP reports from Tel Aviv.

He was due to arrive first in Oman for talks with Sultan Qaboos in his summer residence in Salalah 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) south of Muscat. He will stay overnight in Oman. On Tuesday he will travel to Qatar, for a ground-breaking visit, becoming the first Israeli premier to set foot in the Gulf Arab state.

Snowstorms hit China: Fierce snowstorms and high winds buffeted survivors of an earthquake in a remote corner of northwestern China, destroying more homes and killing livestock, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday, Reuter reports from Beijing.

The storms since early on Saturday had made life extremely difficult for the thousands still homeless from the tremor that shook the sheep farming township of Goltograk and Gulluk in Jiashi county of northwestern Xinjiang last month, it said.

28 Russian troops killed in clashes with Chechens

MOSCOW, Apr 1: Twenty-eight Russian servicemen were killed and 75 were injured in clashes with Chechen rebels on Sunday, hours before President Boris Yeltsin ordered a

'Resurrection of Soviet Union impossible'

WASHINGTON, Apr 1: The resurrection of the former Soviet Union is impossible, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk said in an interview with Newsweek magazine, reports AFP.

Retrospect is good in art, maybe in fashion, but not in politics, the attempts to rebuild the Soviet Union on any basis are fraught with serious consequences, including conflict, he said in Newsweek's upcoming April's edition.

3 MQM members shot dead in Karachi

KARACHI, Apr 1: Three members of the militant opposition Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) were shot dead here today in gunbattles with security forces, police said, reports AFP.

Two of the three, who were all wanted by police, were shot dead in the central Gharibabad area while the third was killed in the eastern district of Korangi, police said. Another two militants were injured and detained.

Seven MQM militants have been killed in "encounters" with police in two days, according to the authorities.

A local MQM leader, Shoab Bokhari, rejected police claim that the men died in gunbattles, saying government forces had again engaged in extra-judicial killings.

MQM chief, Altaf Hussain, in a statement sent to newspapers from London, said the latest killings were a continuation of the government's anti-Mohajir policy.

Hussain threatened to call a weeklong strike in Karachi, Pakistan's commercial capital, to protest the killings.

Mother Teresa breaks her hand?

CALCUTTA, Apr 1: Nobel Peace laureate Mother Teresa is believed to have broken her hand after falling from her bed on Monday, an aide said, reports Reuter.

She hurt her left hand and we suspect a fracture, Shanti, head medical officer at the catholic missionary's headquarters in the eastern city of Calcutta, told Reuters. She said the Yugoslavian-born missionary had been sent to hospital. Mother Teresa, 85, had been scheduled to go to Calcutta airport this morning to witness the arrival of 50 tonnes of medicines and supplies worth more than 12 million US dollars.

The gift, sponsored by the US-based humanitarian organisation Heart to Heart International, was for health care facilities run by other Teresa's organisations, missionaries of charity, in India.

Asian immigrants contribute to US economy: LEAP

WASHINGTON, Apr 1: Asians who immigrate to the United States, far from taking away jobs from Americans, create new jobs, and contribute substantially to the American economy, the Leadership Education for Asia Pacific (LEAP) said in a new study, reports PTI.

Chinese, Filipino, Indian and other Asian and Pacific immigrants, serve as potent examples of an economic shot in the arm due to immigration, the study says.

Fifteen of the nation's most successful high-tech companies were founded by immigrants, including the Chinese, the Filipino, Indian and other Asian and Pacific ethnic groups.

They now have a combined revenue of 22.25 billion dollars, the LEAP study said.

Of the estimated 2000 high-tech companies in Silicon Valley, LEAP points out, 500 are run by Asian-Americans. Asian Americans pay 3 billion dollars a year in wages and are less likely to receive welfare benefits than the native-born.

Forces halt operations against Chechens Yeltsin unveils detailed peace plan for Chechnya

MOSCOW, Apr 1: President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree today giving details of his new peace plan for the breakaway region of Chechnya, Interfax news agency said, reports Reuter.

Yeltsin outlined the plan in a televised address on Sunday. The decree provides for the following steps aimed at ending the 15-month conflict which has killed at least 30,000 people:

- A halt to all military operations in Chechnya from midnight on Sunday (2000 GMT);

- the stage-by-stage withdrawal of Russian troops from inner parts of Chechnya, to outside the borders of the district;

- setting up "islands of peace" as holding peace talks between the Moscow-backed Chechen government, Russian troops and village administrations in different parts of the region;

- holding a conference of

major Chechen forces, Russian authorities and the Moscow-backed government;

- holding a free and fair election to a local legislature;

- holding talks between Moscow and the Moscow-backed government to outline the future status of Chechnya;

- signing a power-sharing deal between Moscow and the pro-Russian Chechen government.

- Asking the state Duma, lower house of parliament, to announce an amnesty for rebel fighters who had not committed serious crimes.

Yeltsin also ordered the creation of a State Commission on Chechnya, to be formed within three days and to be headed by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

Yeltsin told the government to prepare draft laws on the legal framework for a Chechnya settlement and submit them to parliament by June. He gave the government 10

days to organise how to fund the reconstruction of Chechnya without massive fraud.

Yeltsin gave the heads of the security service and the border guard five days to work out a plan on preventing possible terrorist acts by Chechen rebels.

Earlier report says, Russian forces have halted all operations in the breakaway Chechnya region, Russia's ITAR-Tass news agency reported today.

Tass, monitored by Reuters in London, quoted the Commander of Russian forces in Chechnya, Lieutenant-General Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, as saying the operations ceased at midnight on Sunday (2000 GMT).

The military support President Boris Yeltsin's peace initiatives and intend to translate into life rigorously all plans of the head of state to end the armed confrontation in the republic and direct the conflict into the channel of a peaceful dialogue, said Tikhomirov.



American peace activist and teacher Kathleen Kelly (R) of the "Voices in the Wilderness" group, holds a baby at the Qadisiya Hospital in Saddam City on Sunday. The group donated US\$ 16,000 worth of medicine to the hospital. Kelly said the gift was aimed at "deliberately and publicly violating the international economic sanctions" imposed on Iraq since 1990.

Alliance with AIADMK Two ministers may quit to denounce Rao's decision

NEW DELHI, Apr 1: Two ministers may quit the Indian government to denounce the decision of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao to fight general elections in alliance with a Tamil party, party sources said today, reports AFP.

Palaniapan Chidambaram and M. Arunachalam were considering resigning because they disagreed with Rao's move last week to revive his Congress (I) party's alliance with the AIADMK Party in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Both ministers are from Tamil Nadu, a sprawling state of some 55 million people, and have been highly critical of AIADMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jayaram.

"They are disgusted," said a Congress MP. "I think both will leave."

Newspapers quoting Congress officials said Rao was trying to convince at least Commerce Minister Chidambaram, an MP and one of the brains behind the country's economic reforms, to change his mind.

The ministers couldn't be contacted, and Congress spokesmen were not available for comment.

On Sunday, both ministers had a closed-door meeting with Rao, who is also the Congress president. Later, External Affairs Minister Prabhu Mukherjee met Chidambaram as an emissary of the Prime Minister.

The Congress chapter in Tamil Nadu has already split over the decision to team up with the AIADMK, and its local boss G.K. Moopanar on Sunday stunned Rao by saying he will join hands with the rival DMK Party.

The Congress and AIADMK were election allies for more than a decade until Jayalalitha a former movie actress, called off the alliance in 1994. Later the Congress in Tamil Nadu turned bitterly against the AIADMK.

Congress sources say Rao decided to go back to the AIADMK because he was sure his party would not win even half a dozen of Tamil Nadu's 39 parliamentary seats on its own.

7 Israeli soldiers die in chopper crash 'Israel ready for military cooperation with Jordan'

TEL AVIV, Apr 1: Israel is ready to begin military cooperation with its former enemy Jordan, Prime Minister Shimon Peres told Jordan's army chief in talks here Sunday, reports AFP.

"Israel is ready for military cooperation with Jordan and all proposals to this end will be discussed in a positive manner," Peres told General Abdel Hafez Mari al-Kaabneh at the Israeli Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv.

Peres, quoted by a ministry spokesman, also congratulated the first Arab army Chief of Staff to make an official visit to Israel on the invitation of the government and army.

Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in October 1994 to end a state of war that lasted 46 years.

Another report from Mitzpe Shalem says, seven Israeli soldiers died when an army helicopter crashed in the West Bank on Sunday, a military official said.

Two other soldiers were injured when the Sikorsky CH-53 transport helicopter went down in the Judea Desert near the Dead Sea.

The army opened an inquiry into the cause of the crash which happened during a training exercise. A woman soldier was among the seven dead.

Military censors blocked news of the crash for several hours so the army could inform the victims' families.

The crash took place two kilometres (one mile) from the Jewish settlement in Mitzpe Shalem in the south of the West Bank, in an area still under Israeli control.

The helicopter had just taken off when it suddenly began to plummet and crashed for no obvious reason, a military official told AFP.

AP says, Israel's military spending fell three per cent in real terms last year to 31.8 billion shekels (dfrs 10.2 billion), according to a report Sunday.

Direct military spending accounted for only 10 per cent of Israel's GNP in 1995.

Off the Record

He was trying to scale the wrong fence

WASHINGTON: An intoxicated marine corporal was arrested early Sunday as he tried to scale the White House fence, which he apparently thought was the perimeter of his base, an administration spokesman said, reports AFP.

"At 4:10 (0910 GMT) this morning he was attempting to scale the fence. He was detained by secret service personnel and arrested by Washington police," said Brian Cullin, a White House spokesman.

The corporal, identified as Jebediah Morries, reportedly said he was trying to get back to his base — which is several kilometres (miles) away in Quantico, Virginia.

Cullin said the 21-year-old marine was apparently intoxicated and was not armed. He was being held in a Washington jail.

Miraculous!

SYDNEY: A three-year-old boy survived a 20-meter (65-foot) fall from a fifth floor apartment and onto concrete pavement minutes after his father opened a window, reports AP.

"It's quite miraculous," said ambulance paramedic Robert Day, who treated the infant after the accident on Tuesday night.

It appeared to be a free fall onto concrete and remarkably he was conscious when we arrived.

Oscar Blaxland was being treated in Westmead Children's Hospital on Wednesday for suspected spinal and internal injuries.

Karen rebels abandon their last stronghold

BANGKOK, Apr 1: Several hundred Karen guerrillas in eastern Myanmar abandoned their last stronghold over the weekend after a three-day offensive by Myanmar government forces, Thai police and rebel sources said today, reports Reuter.

That security forces were deployed along a stretch of the Thai-Myanmar border in northwestern Mae Hong Son province to prevent any spillover of the fighting after the guerrillas pulled out of a hill-top base just inside Myanmar, a Thai border police officer said.

"We had to abandon our position after three consecutive days of heavy shelling," a Karen guerrilla officer told reporters on the border.

He said that about 400 guerrillas who abandoned the camp broke up into small groups and would wage guerrilla

warfare against the Burmese army.

The guerrilla source said at least 20 Myanmar soldiers were killed over several days of fighting. Three guerrillas were killed.

Troops kill 4 Tigers in Jaffna

COLOMBO, Apr 1: Government troops killed four Tamil Tiger guerrillas, including two women, trying to infiltrate army defences in the early hours of Sunday in northern Sri Lanka, a military spokesman said today, reports AFP.

Troops recovered four automatic rifles and a radio set after the clash in the Valikam area of the northern Jaffna Peninsula where security forces have launched an operation to flush out rebel infiltrators, he said.

FOCUS

Sustainable Development and Rural Poverty Alleviation

by AZM Obaidullah Khan

HERE is an ancient Vedic hymn that chants:

"What O' Earth I dig out of thee Quickly shall that grow again."

May I not O' pure One Pierce thy vital spot or thy heart?

Ecological penury and human deprivation pierce the heart of month earth and humanity alike. Reversing both is precisely the challenge that all civil societies must confront.

Eminent Indian economist, late Sukhomay Chakravarty once said that the phrase "sustainable development" means different things to different people. For a logging company it means sustained projects; for an environmentalist, sustained stock of natural resources, and for an environmentalist, a clean heritage for our children. For multinational companies, as a western joke now goes, it simply means sustained profit (Anil Agarwal, 1995).

Confused as I am with the amorphous connotations of "sustainable development" in an abstract global context, allow me to explore the sustainability issues as they relate to the survival strategies of large numbers of people in rural communities — sometimes marginal and remote, and their knowledge system.

I paraphrase from a Sunday Post report of 12 February, 1995. One Prasit, a Thai district official came to meet the villagers in a forest village in Ban Phue district of Udon-thani. They were asked to cooperate in "returning nature to earth". Living in a forest reserve and without any land title, they had no alternative. So, three bulldozers arrived in the

village graveyard full of indigenous trees. Indigenous trees in this deciduous forest provide the local community with firewood, mushrooms, herbs and other products as well as grazing ground for cattle. Any way, in four or five days, 100 rai of what used to be densely forested land was cleared of trees and ready for reforestation. More than three hundred villagers took part in tree-planting in the rain. In five days the land was replanted with eucalyptus. The villagers wanted to conserve the forest so they could bring their cattle to graze or could collect mushrooms, said villager Chom Thanachai. Having realized their inability to stop the project, Chom said he would like the officials to plant more species than just eucalyptus.

The two world views and their contradictions are obvious. For the villagers, the diversity in natural forest is linked to their livelihood security. Local communities, if I may generalize, rely on food collected throughout the environment. Khon Kacen University nutritionist Prapinora Sompaning has recorded that in rainfed areas of North East Thailand, villagers gather or hunt more than 100 types of natural food from their environment. Research undertaken in 82 villages in semi-arid areas in India (Jodha, 1990) revealed that the poor obtain approximately 15 to 25% of their household income from common property resources which, in addition, provide them with one-third of their farm-inputs. As it also happens, a number of such resources — such as fuelwood, medicinal herbs, resins and gums — are the responsibilities of women and children. Jodha noted a decline in the geo-

mon Property Resources ranging from 26 to 63% over a twenty-year period. This was in part due to the privatization of land, more than half of which was awarded to the non-poor, population growth, and of course the commercial interests conniving with predatory praetorian guards like forest and land settlement officials. If access to environmental resources erode, it is often the poorest of the poor, the women and ethnic minorities that bear the brunt of resulting destitution. If fuelwood is harder to gather, the additional burden of more distant collection falls on the women.

The other world view, however, is driven by the logic of linear growth. Commercial plantations are a sound investment and necessary for industrialization. AS for sustainability, all trees, be they eucalyptus or otherwise, sequester carbon. Moreover, homogenized tree farms like manicured lawns or golf-courses are aesthetically pleasing to the sophisticated eyes.

Let me cite another example. People in the fishing village of Dato in Patani province in Southern Thailand have been managing the use of 20 hectares of mangrove forest for more than 150 years. They fish in the Bay of Patani, while using wood from the community's forest for making fishing equipment and for fuel. Protecting the mangroves is critical for the villagers as the coastal forest provides shelter and breeding grounds for marine life that villagers then fish from the bay. Since 1987, people in Dato have been planting trees in an effort to expand the area of mangrove forest. (Anne Danya Usher).

Contrast this to the sources-based export specialization that has converted 1.2 million hectares of mangroves in Asia into aquaculture ponds. In Thailand 1.6 million rai, out of a mangrove area of 2.4 million rai, has been destroyed. Without making any value judgement on the trade-off between the requirement of export earning and ecological role of mangroves, between private profit and livelihood security of fisherfolk, I am reminded of Mahatma Gandhi's statement on the dichotomy of sustainability and linear growth: "The earth has enough to sustain everyone. But it has got too little to satisfy every one's greed."

Underlying the contrasting world-views is the question of right: of customary and natural right of the marginalized and their local livelihood rights that has occasioned so many known and unknown environmental movements. Long before sustainability became a buzzword in development discourse, village women in Garhwal Himalayas in India resisted the private commercial interest of lime quarrying chanted the slogan, "what do forests bear — soil, water and pure air". Two hundred years before that, Amrita Devi led the Bishnoy community in Rajasthan deserts when all the kings men invaded the little "green" that they had preserved.

The point that I am trying to make is that sustainability is neither a pious wish, nor a question of cost-benefit equation alone. It is a relative concept and arises out of "hard" political issues like patterns of resource control and levels of democracy within the decision-making groups. Sustainability thus demands the creation of a political order in which, firstly, control of natural resources rests the maximum extent possible with local communities who are dependent on those resources; and secondly, decision-making within the community is as participatory, open and democratic as possible (Anil Agarwal, 1995). Another important dimension is the resurrection of local knowledge enhanced by the advances in technology, both for food-security and genetic diversity. The challenge is to return from the general to the particular, the global to the local, the quest for certainty to reasonable uncertainty. Because, as Walter Lippman succinctly puts it, "to every human problem, there is a (universal) solution that is simple, neat and wrong."

Coming back to the unacceptable paradox of hunger and affluence, Asia, for the fifth time in as many years, surged forward in 1995, as our "world's fastest growing region". Figures posted, at year-end, tracked growth at 7.9%. The Asian Development Bank forecasts regional growth may cool to 7.4% and 7.1% this year and next if we maintain this pace. economies of our Region could achieve to a full third of world GDP by the year 2000.

Yet, in this most economically vibrant of regions, we dare not forget: over 493 million are still ill-fed. One person in five does not have access to sufficient calories to lead a healthy active life. Nineteen of twenty-seven member-countries of FAO in Asia and the Pacific are low-income food-deficit countries. The crisis of poverty is concentrated in the countryside, it also festers in

the seemingly intractable income distribution gap even in the fastest growing countries in Asia.

It is true that in two decades, South East Asia has reduced the percentage of undernourished people from 44 to 16 of the total population. South Asia has also reduced the percentage of such population by a third from 34 to 24 per cent. But the obscene scourge of hunger persists.

Cereals self-sufficiency ratios are likely to be little changed at 97 per cent in East Asia and fall slightly from 102 to 97 per cent in South Asia, in the year 2010.

A slight decline projected there for the cereals self-sufficiency ratio in South Asia would double net imports. With prospects of limited export earning and widespread undernutrition, even small additional import requirements are burdensome.

The year 1995 saw the steepest rise in prices of rice, wheat and corn. Nations paid more to buy foodgrains than any other time since the 1970s, and the prices are primed to rise higher. This will mean continuing higher import cost. Also let us not forget the lessons of history. The food crisis in 1972 clearly illustrated that the surplus stock of developed countries which could have ensured the survival of all humanity melted like snow in the sun without the poor being able to glean anything but the crumbs.

Let us also recall that arable lands are their thinnest slivers in this Region. In just twenty years, the balance of the limited uncropped land will be halved in South Asia. East Asia's will be sliced by a third. As a contemporary Chinese saying goes: "Asphalt is the latest crop". I recall a cartoon which appeared in UNESCO Courier in the early seventies. A pigmy was running with a big tree under his arms. Somebody asked him why he was running. The reply came "To find some place for the tree. The cement road is following me." Many aquifers have been pumped into salt-contaminated jugs. Water supplies today have slipped into a third of what they were in the 1950s. By the year 2000, Asians will use 60 out of every 100 gallons. Most will be groundwater although aquifer withdrawals exceed recharge in many areas. Crippling water-shortages have appeared in North China, West and South India, in the Philippines and Thailand.

Besides, eight countries of South Asia lose more than US \$10 billion each year due to land degradation. Water erosion has affected 34% of 45.5 million cultivated hectares in China. The same has degraded 43 million hectares in Indonesia and 13.5 million in the Philippines. Loss of soil fertility has occurred in over 3.2 million hectares in Vietnam. Salinization is affecting another 3 million hectares in Thailand.

The degradation of the paddy environment, whether by micro-nutrient depletion, atmospheric pollution, pest pressure or toxic change in soil-chemistry is greater than the capacity for genetic improvements in yield potentials that breeders can select. Indeed, yield is plateauing if not declining (Peter Kenmore). If an image of homogenized environment and monoculture uniformity imposed from the top, makes chemical agriculture oppressive, an ecological model could open up the possibilities of genetic diversity

and a healthy respect for farmers' knowledge.

The face of hunger and poverty in Asia bears features of its exhausted environment. As ecological "boat people", swell up in numbers in fragile areas and urban slums, all civil societies must confront the challenges outlined above. The same questions will be asked again when world leaders meet in Rome in November, 1996 for the World Food Summit. Will the new century bring for our children abundance and joy or will they grow up listless in perilous conditions that compromise their survival? Will their sky be resplendent with rainbow and singing with birds or will it become even more desolate? Will there only be exhausted earth and manicured plantation or will there be forests humming with innumerable species and giving us water soil and clear air?

We must answer if we are committed to heal our planet and ourselves. And that, Excellencies, is a spiritual work. "If we lose the environment, we lose God."

Allow me, once again, to end with a sub-title of a Sunday Bangkok Post article. "Return the water to the fish, the sky to the birds, the earth to the worms and the power to the people. Will the slogan ever come true?"

Let us never forget the painful views of lonely water and abandoned sky, the exhausted soil and the broken ploughs, the dehydrated mother and the crawling baby fumbling for her mother's breasts. And, never, as John Lennon said, is such a long time.

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