

BRIEFLY



Three Bosnian Muslim women weep after being reunited at Sarajevo's refugee camp on Thursday. Two of the women returned with 122 others from Turkey after fleeing the Bosnian capital in 1992. — AFP/UNB photo

20 killed in Pak road mishap: Twenty people were killed and 35 others seriously injured when a speeding bus turned turtle in a deep ditch in northwestern Pakistan Thursday evening, said the official sources. Xinhua reports from Peshawar.

The bus from the Scenic Swat in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) to Mardan, a NWFP city in the south of Swat, fell into a 2,500-metre deep ravine when it was crossing the Malakand pass. Hundreds of people rushed to the site and rescued the injured. The injured have been sent to local hospitals.

Russian defence team to visit US: A group of Russian missile defence experts is heading to the United States on Saturday for joint exercises with their American counterparts, AP reports from Moscow.

The five-day exercises under the auspices of the US Space Command begin Monday at Falcon Air Force Base, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The Russian team is experienced in the use of anti-aircraft weapons, including different modifications of the ZRK S-300, the Russian army told the ITAR-Tass news agency.

Ghali arrives in Ankara: Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the UN secretary-general, arrived Ankara on Thursday for talks about the status of the divided Mediterranean island of Cyprus, AP reports from Ankara. He will also attend a UN conference in Istanbul on problems of cities. Boutros-Ghali, scheduled to meet with Turkish Cypriot leader Rauf Denktaş next week in Istanbul, hopes to revive stalled talks between the Greek and Turkish sides.

Gorbachev warns of fraud in polls: Warning of the possibility of fraud in Russia's presidential election Mikhail Gorbachev said the blame for any vote rigging will fall on President Boris Yeltsin since he controls the election commissions, AP reports from Moscow.

"And that is why I say in the Duma and in the regions and among the deputies there are a lot of concerns," Gorbachev said in an interview to be broadcast Friday on the US television programme "talking with David Frost." He said election officials may not be impartial because they have largely been appointed by Yeltsin's administration.

4 get life terms in Thailand: Four men who confessed to the murder of a high-ranking government media official were sentenced to life in prison Thursday, AP reports from Bangkok.

The four men said they were hired to carry out the killing of Sangchai Sunthornvut, the director of the Mass Communications Organisation of Thailand. He was shot to death in his car by a gunman on a motorcycle on April 11. The organisation operates one of the country's five television networks, several radio stations, and the national news agency.

Iran hails Russia-Chechnya truce: Iran on Thursday welcomed ceasefire agreement between Russia and Muslim Chechen rebels, saying it hoped peace would be achieved through continued talks, state-run Tehran Radio said, Reuters reports from Tehran.

It quoted foreign ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi as saying Iran hoped "the agreement... would be respected by both sides and that talks would continue until an ultimate peace is achieved and the crisis is ended totally."

2 N Korean defectors reach Seoul: Two North Koreans who requested political asylum in South Korea arrived here by air from Hong Kong yesterday airport authorities and witnesses said, AFP reports from Seoul.

The plane carrying the two defectors, identified in local press reports as Scientist Chung Kap-Ryol and broadcast drama writer Chang Hai-Sung, touched down at 1:07 pm (0407 GMT), airport staff said.

UN renews Golan peacekeepers: The Security Council voted unanimously Thursday to keep its peacekeepers on the Israeli-Syrian border for at least six more months, AP reports from United Nations.

Some 1,000 peacekeepers from Austria, Canada, Japan and Poland are based on the Golan Heights. The force was first deployed after a truce agreement was signed the year after the 1973 Middle East war.

Russia, China talk N-plant: Russia is negotiating a contract for building a nuclear plant in northern China and it may be signed by the end of the year, a news report said Thursday, AP reports from Moscow.

Russia and China signed a deal on the Liaoning plant in December 1992 but have not agreed on financing or other details of the contract, the Interfax news agency said. Viktor Kozlov, head of the state-owned Atomenergokombinat company, said if an agreement is signed, Russia will make a \$2.5 billion credit available to China with 4 per cent interest.

Israeli jets rocket Hezbollah posts in Lebanon

BAALBEK, Lebanon, May 31: Israeli fighter jets rocketed suspected guerrilla targets in Lebanon on Friday in apparent retaliation for guerrillas killing four Israeli soldiers in a bomb blast, security sources said, reports Reuters.

The planes fired a number of rockets into an outpost belonging to pro-iranian Hezbollah (Party of God) guerrillas at Kayyal Hill overlooking the entrance of the city of Baalbek, 70 km (44 miles) east of Beirut. There was no immediate word on casualties.

Israel to remain committed to peace process: Netanyahu

JERUSALEM, May 31: Challenger Benjamin Netanyahu has taken tough positions with the Palestinians during his campaign to be Israel's prime minister, reports AP.

As prime minister, however, he will not have a free hand. In fact, he will find it difficult to implement extreme policies and maintain Israel's newly won international standing and relations with the Arab world.

Netanyahu, who has a slim but tough-to-overcome lead with all but the absentee ballot counted, drew his strength from anger and frustration over suicide bombings by Muslim extremists that killed 59 victims.

Taiwan vows to continue drive for UN seat

TAIPEI, May 31: Despite China's objections, Taiwan vowed Friday to continue its drive for United Nations membership and greater participation on the world stage, reports AP.

Foreign Minister Frederick Chien said the campaign for greater international recognition was popular with Taiwanese and would not be adjusted in the wake of recent tensions with Beijing.

Taiwan "is a democratic nation and acts on the will of the people," Chien said at a news conference. "If we did not promote these policies actively we would not be in accordance with the will of the people."

Taiwan lost its UN seat to China in 1971. The United States in 1979 switched recognition to China, and today just 31 countries have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

Beijing regards Taiwan as a rebel province to be isolated diplomatically. It has singled out Taiwan's bid for UN membership as an obstacle blocking talks between the two sides, which were suspended after Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui visited the United States last year.

India's missile research centre closed after blast

HYDREABAD, May 31: India's top missile research centre was shut down Friday after an explosion and fire in one of its chemical gas processing units, witnesses and fire officials said, reports AP.

The midnight explosion was so loud that it was heard 10 kilometres (6 miles) away. Its force cracked walls on houses closer in, said one resident.

At least 16 people were injured in the blast and fire. Press Trust of India news agency said.

Firefighters worked through the night to control the blaze that started in a processing unit, a fire official said. No other details of the damage were available.

Officials at the centre refused to speak to The Associated Press. A person who answered the phone of Assistant Director Maj. Gen. R K Bagga said he was advised not to entertain any calls from journalists.

US plans to send envoy to Myanmar

WASHINGTON, May 31: The US government is planning to send an envoy to Myanmar to appeal for the release of pro-democracy activists who have been detained in recent days, the State Department said Thursday, reports AP.

Spokesman Nicholas Burns said the administration is searching for the most appropriate envoy to carry that message.

Of the more than 200 people who have been detained, only about five have been released, Burns said.

He added that the envoy would travel to nearby countries in an effort to coordinate an international response to the recent developments in Myanmar.

The Myanmar authorities, Burns said, should not be let off scot free.

Dole promises to push NATO expansion

CHICAGO, May 31: Sen. Bob Dole promised former Polish President Lech Walesa on Thursday to introduce legislation calling on President Clinton to expedite the process of inviting Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to join the NATO alliance, reports AP.

Dole met Walesa in Chicago, where the Kansas senator was campaigning for president. Walesa is on a tour of the United States.

Walesa said making the central European democracies full partners in NATO would be "a beautiful victory and a final point of victory of my struggle. He also said it would be a fitting legacy of Dole's military service in World War II.

President Clinton has supported expansion of NATO, but on a slower timetable than advocated by most Republicans. Administration policy is designed to reduce the prospect of a rift with the government of Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

The House Republican Policy Committee has endorsed immediate expansion of NATO to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and legislation is expected to reach the house floor soon.

'Strikers would be forced to work at gunpoint' Chandrika blames power utility workers for sabotage

COLOMBO, May 31: Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga today accused striking power utility workers of sabotage and said they would be forced to work at gunpoint if necessary, reports Reuters.

"Short of killing people, we will do what we can to restore power," she said.

Sri Lanka has been without grid electricity since Wednesday after some 13,500 workers at the state-owned power monopoly Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) went on strike.

The unions want the government to halt the privatisation of Lanka Electricity Company (LECO), a branch of the CEB. They also demanded an end to privatisation of services provided by the CEB including the approval of private sector power plants.

The strike hit water, health and sewerage services throughout the island and knocked out pumps at petrol stations.

The government declared

that state power generation and distribution were essential services under emergency regulations. Failure by CEB employees to comply with the regulations and return to work could result in their dismissal and the loss of homes provided by the state.

AP adds: The President vowed Friday to do everything "short of killing people" to end a strike that has caused a three-day nationwide power blackout.

Nationwide, millions of people stayed home from work to hunt for food, fuel and other essential items, forming long lines at the few gas stations and supermarkets that remained open.

Most stores that opened had sold out of mineral water, food, candles, batteries and flashlights. The stock market remained closed, and banks said they would only open for a few hours.

With temperatures reaching

32 degrees Celsius (90 Fahrenheit) in tropical Sri Lanka, the food in home refrigerators quickly spoiled, and most water taps in Colombo went dry.

Hospitals delayed all but essential surgery as their medicine and blood supplies began going off for lack of refrigeration.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga said on Friday that thousands of pints of blood spoiled at the blood bank and several patients died at government hospitals badly affected by the blackout.

State-owned Sri Lanka Telecom said its services already were relying on overloaded standby generators. Once they fail, every phone in the country will go dead, it said.

Many factories in Sri Lanka's three industrial areas were closed. A few managed to open Friday with the help of generators.



A doctor from the Beijing Municipal Health Department holds up a mouse which died immediately after he injected it with the nicotine distilled from one normal cigarette on Friday, World Anti-Tobacco Day, at a fair to educate people on the negative effects of smoking. One third of Chinese, or 350 million people are smokers. — AFP/UNB photo

Zyuganov calls for an overhaul of privatisation Yeltsin's polls platform challenges Communists on their field

MOSCOW, May 31: In a bid to steal the populist thunder from his Communist challenger, President Boris Yeltsin unveiled an election platform Friday that promises bigger paychecks, better benefits and four years of stability, reports AP.

"In the last years we managed to fill our stores," he said in a speech to the voters in the Urals city of Perm. "Now we must fill pocketbooks."

Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov has accused Yeltsin of impoverishing Russians and called in his platform for an overhaul of privatisation, bigger subsidies to state industry and restoring the Soviet-era social safety net.

He and Yeltsin are locked in a tight race with just three weeks to go before the June

16 vote

On Friday, Yeltsin responded with a hefty volume released to the official news agency ITAR-Tass and to several leading newspapers and the speech in Perm.

Russia's path today is a path forward, Yeltsin said. "A great power mustn't back down."

Firing a broadside at his Communist foe, Yeltsin promised to compensate people for savings lost to inflation during his free-market reforms, introduce a guaranteed minimal wage and increase spending on education and health care.

He vowed to fight crime and corruption, end the war in Chechnya and achieve an economic growth of 4 per cent a year and annual inflation of 5

per cent by the year 2000. Inflation was 131 per cent last year.

Taking the game to the Communist's favorite field, Yeltsin also promised more state support for key industries and protection from foreign imports for domestic producers.

In a response to Communist laments over the Soviet collapse and popular longing for closer relations with former Soviet republics, Yeltsin said he would continue to strengthen ties with neighboring nations. As for the West, he said: "Thank God they stopped fearing us and began to respect us instead."

Yeltsin promised to end the draft by the year 2000 and give Russia a professional army instead.



On the day that his divorce from his wife, the former Sarah Ferguson becomes absolute, Britain's Duke of York — the second son of Queen Elizabeth II — has a smile and wave for photographers as he drives away from Weymouth Railway Station on Thursday. The divorce will be granted at the High Court in London Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

Joining United Front govt Basu rules out shift in earlier decision

CALCUTTA, May 31: The West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, last night ruled out any possibility of the CPI (M) reconsidering its decision of not joining the United Front government, reports PTI.

Talking to newsmen at the airport before leaving for Delhi, Basu said his party had already taken a decision on the matter.

He said there were two views in the party on the matter, but the decision of the majority was more important, and should be accepted.

When a scribe commented that a leader like him could have been a better prime minister, Basu said, it's good to hear about it, but individual is immaterial. Party's decision is final.

Replying to a question that prime minister designate, HD Devegowda has expressed his willingness to step down in his favour, Basu said, I know it.



Front government would be able to complete its five year term with the support of the Congress, he said, how can I say? Congress is supporting the United Front for its own survival. It's a strange situation. Another five to seven years would be required to overcome the situation.

Off the Record

Hearty honour

CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts: World War I prevented Joe Goldstein from attending his graduation from Harvard. Now, at 101, he will lead the traditional alumni parade at commencement next week, reports AP.

"I sure as hell was a hoot," he said of being asked to head the line of march in Harvard Yard. He will be in a wheelchair for the parade, as he has been for seven years because of diabetes.

Instead of graduating with his class nearly 80 years ago, Goldstein enlisted in the Army a month before the ceremony and fought in France during World War I. Harvard gave him the diploma two years later when he got out of the Army.

"I guess they wanted to see if I'd make it back first," he said.

He worked in his father's shoe manufacturing company in Boston from 1920 until he retired in 1985.

His wife, Anna, died a few years ago after more than 70 years of marriage. He said the secret of a good marriage was: "I always agreed with her."

Sperm to be treated under food and drugs act!

OTTAWA: The federal government will ban the use of fresh sperm in donor insemination and introduce strict measures to screen sperm donors, reports AP.

Under regulations announced Thursday, semen used in assisted insemination will be treated for legal purposes as if it were a drug and regulated under the Food and Drugs Act.

The new regulations are intended to eliminate the risk of transmitting AIDS or other diseases through a procedure used by thousands of Canadian women annually.

Semen will have to be frozen and quarantined for six months before it can be implanted in a woman.

Donors must be tested when the semen is given and again six months later to ensure there was no hidden infection at the time of the first test.

Doctors who violate the regulations will be liable to large fines or prison terms.

This is one step in the government's endeavour to protect those Canadians most affected by new reproductive and genetic technologies," said Health Minister David Dingwall.

Experts have said for years that fresh sperm should not be used in donor insemination, yet it is believed that some doctors do so.

"It is my understanding that this practice is still going on in Canada," said John Jarrell, a Calgary doctor and specialist in infertility treatment.

Triples thru' ICSI

CALCUTTA: Triplets, a boy and two girls, were born through the Intra Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI) method, the latest micro-manipulation technique, at an infertility clinic here, reports PTI.

Dr S-Ghose Dasgupta, the research director of ICSI at the clinic, said this was for the first time in the country that triplets were born to a 30-year-old woman from the city on Wednesday were doing fine.

Stating that the centre was successful in delivering 6 babies through ICSI method since April last year, Dr Ghose Dasgupta said the importance of this pregnancy lay in the fact that all the three pre-embryos produced by ICSI, were replaced in the uterus.

The clinic would now be able to offer this method on a regular basis.

Int'l mediators reject contact with Karadzic official

SARAJEVO, May 31: International mediators stepped up pressure on Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic on Thursday, saying they would not work with the hardline nationalist he recently named to assume some of his duties, reports AP.

Carl Bildt, the civilian administrator for implementing the Dayton peace agreement, said in a statement his office would refuse any contacts with Biljana Plavsic, chosen vice president by Karadzic on May 20.

By handing over some duties to Plavsic, Karadzic hoped to allow Bildt to resume contacts with the Bosnian Serb leadership. But Bildt's statement characterized the move as a bid by Karadzic to "hang on to public office in clear violation of the peace agreement."

Meanwhile, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic faces the threat of renewed sanc-

Libya building chemical weapons facility: US

WASHINGTON, May 31: The US State Department said Thursday it stands by its contention that Libya is building a chemical weapons facility despite a finding by Egyptian inspectors that there is no evidence of such activity, reports AP.

President Hosni Mubarak said earlier this week the inspectors found nothing suspicious when they visited the site of the alleged construction, southeast of Tripoli.

"There is no chemical installation for the time being and there is no activity there," he was quoted as saying.