

International

BRIEFLY

26 missing as ships collide in ROK:

At least 26 seamen, mostly from the Philippines, were missing after their freighter sank after it was rammed over the weekend by another foreign ship off South Korea's southern coast, maritime police said yesterday. AFP reports from Seoul.

The Cyprus-registered 14,900-tonne *Anaspispiro* with 26 sailors aboard was hit Saturday by the Greece-registered freighter *Polydektis* in foggy weather near the southern island of Roje, maritime police said. South Korean Navy boats immediately launched an overnight search but failed to rescue any of the missing crew who included a Greek captain and Egyptian sailor and 24 Filipinos, the police said.

Cypriot president to meet Clinton: Cypriot President Gavros Clerides is to meet US President Bill Clinton in Washington on Monday, with hopes rising that the time may finally be right to end the Mediterranean island's 22-year division, AFP reports from Nicosia.

The separation of Cyprus between Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot zones, with 1,200 UN peacekeepers manning a buffer zone in between, will be at top of the agenda during the two leaders' meeting officials said. Cypriot foreign minister Alecos Michaelides said there was a new declared US interest that could help push forward a solution in coordination with the United Nations and European Union.

Jazz queen Ella Fitzgerald dies:

Jazz Legend Ella Fitzgerald, beloved by millions as America's "First Lady of Songs" died on Saturday at her Beverly Hills home. She was 78 years old, Reuter reports from Los Angeles. Fitzgerald, who had been in declining health in recent years with complications from diabetes, died peacefully, surrounded by family and friends, spokeswoman Andres Hecht said. The exact cause of death was not released, but Fitzgerald had rarely appeared in public since 1993, when both of her legs had to be amputated below the knee.

Mild quake rocks Philippines: A mild earthquake rocked the southern Philippine island of Mindanao before dawn yesterday but caused no damage or casualties, authorities said, AFP reports from Manila.

The quake, measuring 2.5 on the Richter Scale, made hanging objects sway in the city of Iligan but was barely perceptible in the city of Cagayan De Oro which is located just beside the epicentre. Government volcanologists said the quake was caused by the movement of a local fault in Misamis oriental province.

Slayers of Greek tourists killed: Two Muslim militants who shot and killed 18 Greek tourists near the pyramids were killed in a gunbattle with police, Egypt's interior minister said Saturday. AP reports from Cairo.

The shooting erupted when police tried to arrest the men. Hassan el-Alfy said. Four policemen were also killed and 14 others wounded, he said in comments carried by the state-run Al-Akhbar Al-Yom newspaper. El-Alfy did not say when the militants were killed. But police said in April that two militants believed to have carried out the attack died in a shootout with police in the town of Malawi, a militant stronghold 260 kilometres (160 miles) south of Cairo.

Christopher to visit Israel next week: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher will visit Israel next week to help prepare Prime Minister elect Benjamin Netanyahu's first official trip to Washington the Jerusalem Post newspaper said on Sunday. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Netanyahu's spokesman denied Christopher's visit was agreed. The newspaper, quoting diplomatic sources, said Christopher would also brief Netanyahu on "secret details" in Israeli-Syrian peace talks in which the US has played a role.

Gunmen kill 17 in Colombia: At least 17 people were murdered in two separate grisly incidents in Colombia early Saturday, police said, AFP reports from Bogota.

In a crowded neighbourhood of the country's second city, Medellin, heavily armed men opened fire on a group of young men, killing 10 of them aged between 17 and 24. While fleeing the scene the assailants opened fire again, killing two more youths. The motive for the massacre was not immediately clear.

Papandreou recovering: Former Greek prime minister Andreas Papandreou, recovering from serious illness plans to attend his Pasok Party special congress at the end of the month, the parliament Speaker said Saturday. AFP reports from Athens.

The 77-year-old socialist was forced to resign as the country's leader in January after coming close to death but remains president of Pasok, the ruling socialist party. Papandreou whose return to the political scene has rated political problems for his successor Prime Minister Costas Simitis is very worried about the unity of his party Speaker Apostolos Karamanlis said.

France condemns violence in Bahrain: French President Jacques Chirac has sent a message of support to Bahrain assuring the Gulf Emirate of France's backing for its attempts to restore order and stability the Bahraini agency GNA said Saturday. AFP reports from Manama.

Chirac told the Emir of Bahrain Sheikh Issa ibn Salman al Khalifa that he condemned recent violence in the Emirate and underlined the friendly relations between the two countries GNA said. The Emir called for support from several

Burundi peace mediator asks African states to intervene if he fails

DARESSALAAM: June 16: Burundi peace mediator Mwalimu Julius Nyerere here today asked African countries to intervene in the country if his peace initiatives failed, reports Xinhua.

The former Tanzanian president briefed the press of the current political developments in that war-battered country. Nyerere was reacting to a question posed on him on whether he sanctioned the idea of military intervention as suggested by some African countries recently.

"I don't find anything bad in intervening with the situation in Burundi if it gets off hand," he said, adding "we cannot keep quiet when we see our neighbours kill each other."

He said the current developments in Burundi indicated

that the country would plunge into bloodshed on a genocidal scale, like the neighbouring Rwanda where some one million people were slaughtered in 1994.

He said, however, there was a big possibility for the antagonist parties in Burundi to strike a deal for an everlasting peace in their country through dialogue.

The mediator said that the bone of the conflict was that both the Hutu and the Tutsi feared for their existence.

The Hutus account for an estimated 85 per cent of Burundi's 5.6 million people. Burundi's blood letting was triggered by a failed coup against the government of Ndegeye and his Front for Democracy in Burundi (Frodebu) which won 71 per cent of the vote.

Indian Muslims in UK urge Gowda to free TADA victims

LONDON: June 16: The Indian Muslim Federation in Britain has urged the Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda to immediately release innocent Muslims still imprisoned under the Terrorists and Disruptive Elements (Prevention) Act (TADA), reports PTI.

In a letter to Gowda, the chairman of the federation, I A Shaikh said, ejection of BJP from power was not an end, but means to an end — justice for minorities, particularly the Muslims, would be done by giving them jobs in police, army and governmental and semi-governmental departments.

Any ill feelings and mistrust, especially on baseless and assumed grounds against any community was detrimental to healthy progress of the country, Shaikh said.

He told the Post in an interview he thinks the Burmese people will act as one and be-

come more defiant of the regime and more assertive in their quest for democracy.

Tin Maung Win's remarks come amid growing pressure by the SLORC on the democracy movement in Myanmar.

The comments were made by Tin Maung Win, vice president of the Democratic Alliance of Burma, an umbrella organisation of anti-government groups.

"I see more difficult days ahead as the SLORC, in a futile attempt to destroy the pro-democracy movement, commits more blunders and become more irrational," Tin Maung Win said, referring to the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

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Organisers said 10,000 people took part in a march through central Paris.

Tin Maung Win said the opposition movement has decided to step up its drive for democracy in Myanmar since it does not believe the SLORC's promise to transfer power to an elected civilian government.

"It is no longer necessary to receive SLORC's blessings to restore democracy to Burma," he said.

Taiwan with the mainland and to China's eventual bid to claim disputed territory in South China Sea waters.

"One of the reasons for Moscow's new emphasis on the Far East is its disenchantment with Western democracies, which do not regard the Kremlin as an equal partner. Just look at NATO's expansion plans," says Alexei Voskresenski, a senior expert with the Russian Academy of Sciences' Far Eastern Studies Institute.

On the other hand China sees the cementing of ties with Russia serving its own ambitions. "China wants to secure all its borders, especially the one with Russia so that it can turn its sights to the South-East," says a military analyst in Beijing.

So that although senior Chinese communists detest Yeltsin's democratic creden-

tials, the Russian president was welcomed with open arms when he visited Beijing in April.

Yeltsin's visit was on the heels of the visit to Seoul and Tokyo, of US President Bill Clinton who not only reaffirmed the continued presence of US troops in the region, but together with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, carved out an enhanced role for Japan in Asian security.

Analysts say China therefore viewed the April 24-26 visit of Yeltsin as the perfect response to the Clinton's trip.

Russian-Chinese bilateral documents finalised during the visit included a joint declaration on international policy cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as agreements on military aid and energy, transport and communications projects.

The two also discussed a pact on three disputed plots of land on the border, which are to go to China under a 1991 delimitation treaty. Yeltsin's commitment to return disputed border lands to China has been appreciated by the Chinese leadership.

The pace of Russian-Chinese relations has steadily gained momentum since Yeltsin first visited in December 1992. Two years later the Chinese reciprocated, coming to Moscow to sign no-strike first nuclear accords.

And while Beijing indicates there can be no return to the Stalin-Mao "eternal bond" of the 40s and early 50s, they also maintain that the tension of the 1960s when rival regimes nearly went to war in 1969 in a border clash over a disputed river island, are also

long forgotten days.

The 4,000 km Sino-Russian border that once witnessed bitter clashes between Russian and Chinese armies, now hums with bilateral trade that touched 5.46 billion US dollar last year.

"Moscow believes the Russo-Chinese alliance together with the political and military bond of the Commonwealth of Independent States can become a counter-balance to NATO expansion," Voskresenski says.

"But such an alliance must not be directed expressly against the West," he says. "Russia should keep its Western and Eastern policies on different planes allowing it geopolitical stability and intensive contact with all parties."

Thousands of people cross over Bonn's Kennedy Bridge on their way to the huge post-war trade union rally to condemn Chancellor Helmut Kohl's stiff austerity programme. Police estimated the crowd at 350,000.

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Top Israeli peacemaker pessimistic about ME peace

JERUSALEM: June 16: A top Israeli peacemaker predicted Saturday that the emerging right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu will not pursue final peace settlement with the Palestinians, reports AP.

"He will not go forward with an agreement with the Palestinians based on what was signed by both sides," said Yossi Beilin, a Cabinet minister who engineered the Israel-PLO autonomy accords. "The results will be grave for the future of Israel."

Netanyahu, meanwhile, was meeting with lawmakers from religious and centrist groups in an effort to conclude coalition deals that will enable him to present a new government to the Knesset for approval early next week.

The Likud Party leader, a bitter opponent of the Israel-PLO accords, scored a narrow upset victory over Prime Minister Shimon Peres in Israel's

May 29 election. Although he says he now accepts the existing Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza and will continue peace talks, he remains strongly opposed to the independent state which Palestinians hoped would be the end result of the process.

The emerging Israeli government, based on parties that opposed the Israel-PLO peace deals, indicates Netanyahu has no intention of meeting the May 1999 deadline set for reaching for a final peace settlement, said Beilin.

The Palestinians and other Arab nations, increasingly concerned that the peace process is in danger, have called a summit in Cairo later this month to discuss the new situation.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat accused Netanyahu of avoiding contact with the Palestinian leadership, despite its efforts.

Afghan leaders' planned meet in US criticised as pro-govt factions ignored

KABUL: June 16: A senior Afghan government official Saturday criticised a planned meeting of Afghan leaders in Washington, saying the sponsors had ignored some important pro-government factions, reports AFP.

Deputy Foreign Minister Abdul Rahim Ghafoorai described the move which is reportedly sponsored by US Senator Hank Brown as "imbalanced and regrettable" but said the Afghan government would attend the meeting.

The rebels have tried to divert troops away from the main front in the north by attacking small military bases in the east, massacring Sinhalese civilians.

The rebels have rejected the proposal, which would also have to be accepted by voters in a referendum.

The guerrillas have been retreating in the face of a series of military onslaughts which began in the northern Jaffna Peninsula in October.

Each time, it was they who broke off the talks and attacked without warning. This time we will not make that mistake," he said.

The guerrillas scuttled the last peace talks and a truce in April 1995 after saying the government was not sincere in its efforts to end the war peacefully.

Parliament is considering President Chandrika Kumaratunga's plan to make Sri Lanka a federation of eight regions, including a Tamil-dominated one, each with wide powers of self-rule.

Troops killed six men of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and seized their weapons in the northern peninsula of Jaffna overnight while two more were killed in the eastern district of Batticaloa, officials said.

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