

India agrees to build chemical plant in Iran

LONDON, June 24: India has agreed to build a sophisticated chemical plant in Iran that could be used to manufacture chemical weapons, the Sunday Telegraph reported. The plant will manufacture phosphorus pentasulphide, which can be used to make pesticides or the same kind of chemical weapons Iraq used against the Kurds at the end of the 1991 Gulf War, the paper said. It can also be used to make primitive chemical weapons which could be fitted to ballistic missiles for use against Iran's longstanding enemies, such as Israel, the paper said. According to the Sunday Telegraph, the Iranians raised the possibility of a chemical plant during a state visit to New Delhi by Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani last year. The secret deal believed to be worth more than 10 million pounds (15.4 million dollars) was negotiated earlier this year by Mell Agrochemicals, an Iranian company specialising in pesticide production, it said. Under the deal, an unidentified Bombay company will build a "turn-key" chemicals complex for the Iranians at Gazvin on the outskirts of Tehran, the paper said. Work is expected to begin later this year. The Sunday Telegraph said phosphorus pentasulphide has been identified as a trigger agent in lethal chemicals by the Australia Group, an international body set up to curb the development of chemical weapons. Members of the Australia Group, including the United States and Britain, are required to observe strict restrictions on the use of phosphorus pentasulphide. But neither Iran nor India belong to the group, the paper said.



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat (L) discusses with Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi during their meeting in Cairo on Sunday where they participated at the two-day summit of 21 Arab countries. — AFP/UNB photo

Israel's envoy to US to resign

JERUSALEM, June 24: Israel's ambassador to Washington, who spearheaded fruitless peace negotiations with Syria for several years, is resigning, reports AP. Itamar Rabinovitch, a Mideast expert specialising in Syria, had been widely expected to step down after last month's election victory by Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu. His resignation becomes effective on September 1, the Foreign Ministry said Sunday. Rabinovitch was appointed in 1992 by the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of the Labour Party, a close friend. Since then, Rabinovitch was Israel's most frequent interlocutor with the Syrians, who refused to upgrade talks to the level of senior government officials. Rabin and his successor, Shimon Peres, had indicated they might meet Syria's demand for a total withdrawal from the Golan Heights, which Israel seized in 1967, in exchange for peace.

Yeltsin for strengthening military power

MOSCOW, June 24: Campaigning on the doorstep of Russia's western neighbours, President Boris Yeltsin promised Sunday to strengthen the navy and shore up the nation's status as a military power, reports AP. Yeltsin targeted Russia's vast military electorate and nationalist voters on a trip to Kaliningrad, his first since qualifying for a presidential runoff against Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov. But with just 10 days to go until the crucial vote, the president received only half-hearted backing Sunday from a pro-reform group whose leader finished fourth in the first round of voting. After a two-day, closed-door conference, the liberal Yabloko group led by economist Grigory Yavlinsky decided it could support Yeltsin in the July 3 runoff only under certain conditions, Russian news reports said. Yabloko prides itself as the democratic opposition. Only 63 of the 152 conference delegates voted Sunday to back Yeltsin, while two voted to support Zyuganov and 87 to vote against both candidates — an option in Russian elections, independent NTV television said. On Yavlinsky's urging, the conference adopted a resolution saying Yabloko could not actively support Yeltsin but would give him conditional support depending on whether he showed a willingness to meet their demands, the report said. A poll released Sunday put Yeltsin safely ahead, with 53 per cent saying they would vote for the president in the runoff and only 34 backing Zyuganov. The poll, commissioned by NTV's toki news program, was conducted Tuesday through Friday, and it was unclear to what extent it reflected reaction to this week's Kremlin shakeup.

BRIEFLY

Clashes leave 13 dead in Mogadishu: Fighting between rival militias intensified in Mogadishu on Sunday after at least 13 people were killed in weekend clashes between supporters of faction leader Mohamed Farah Aidid and two other warlords. Reuters reports from Mogadishu. Hospital officials said nine people were killed and 16 wounded in fighting between Aidid's militia and supporters of Mohamed Farah Aidid, who is allied to Ali Mahdi Mohamed, on Saturday and fighting between them intensified on Sunday.

6 swimmers drowned in Italy: A German and five Italians drowned in heavy surf Sunday, adding to the list of victims from storms that have pummeled much of Italy for days. AP reports from Balestrate. Four of the drownings occurred along the same stretch of beach near Balestrate, about 30 kilometres (18 miles) south-west of Palermo. Two others broke in the Ragusa province near the southern tip of the island.

Road mishap kills 6 in Mexico: At least six people were killed and 19 injured when a bus and a truck collided on the Mexico City-Nogales highway, authorities said, AFP reports from Mexico City. The truck burst into flames after the crash and was completely destroyed, the official news agency Notimex quoted officials as saying. The crash occurred five kilometres (eight miles) from the city of Escuinapa in northwestern Mexico.

Suu Kyi's friend dies in prison: As democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi continued to exercise her limited freedom by addressing a crowd of 5,000 supporters Sunday, her aide said one of her close friends had died in prison. AP reports from Yangon. James Leander Nicholas, a 65-year-old Anglo-Myanmar businessman, died Saturday of a hemorrhage in a prison hospital. Suu Kyi's aides told The Associated Press. The military government permitted only two of his many family members to attend his funeral Sunday, they said.

Plane crash kills 2 in China: Two people were killed and ten injured when a passenger plane plowed into a hill near an airport in the northeastern province of Shandong, the China daily reported yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

For involvement in \$36m LC scandal

Nepali govt asks police to arrest about 100 suspects

KATHMANDU, June 24: The Nepali government has ordered the arrest of about 100 people suspected of involvement in one of the Himalayan Kingdom's biggest financial scandals, state media said today, reports Reuters. The RSS news agency said government investigators had asked police to arrest the suspects and produce them for questioning over the two billion rupee (\$36 million dollars) scandal. The Revenue Investigation Department has already written to the police asking them to arrest about 100 persons involved in the scam and present them before the department for recording their statements, the state-owned news agency said. Earlier this month authorities said a government-appointed panel probing fake Letters of Credit (LC) had named 175 business houses and commercial banks suspected of involvement in the affair. They said two billion rupees' worth of foreign currency had been sent out of the country in the form of payment for fake Letters of Credit (LC) without any goods actually being imported. The transactions resulted in a revenue loss of 510 million rupees (9 million dollars) to the government due to non-payment of import duties, authorities said. The deflection of a huge amount of foreign exchange has caused a massive loss to the country and the people in general want to see the guilty punished, the Finance Ministry said in a statement today.

Ghali urged to make an 'exit with dignity'

UNITED NATIONS, June 24: Despite support from the Third World, the New York Times called Sunday on UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to make an "exit with dignity" after the United States vowed to block a second term, reports AP. Boutros Boutros-Ghali has provided honorable and competent leadership as secretary-general of the United Nations these past five years, the newspaper said in an editorial Sunday. "But it is time for him to turn the job over to a more dynamic executive who can reform the organisation and restore its credibility to Americans." Last week, the Clinton Administration announced it would use its Security Council veto if necessary to block the 73-year-old Egyptian diplomat from a second five-year term. The 51-member council must agree on a successor and forward his name to the 188-member General Assembly before Boutros-Ghali's term expires on December 31.

Off the Record

Flying restaurant
LONDON: If there's any place left in Britain that still has no Indian takeaway, relief is at hand, reports AFP. The Indian flying restaurant says it can deliver hot, fresh South Asian cuisine from kitchens in Stevenage and Cambridge to anywhere in Great Britain where its helicopter can land. "What we are doing is using local airfields and golf courses where we can get permission to land," a spokesman said Sunday. The company utilises the skills of Mustafa Aolad, a trained pilot and chef. He added, "As well as cooking the dishes, he will fly them to dinner parties anywhere in the United Kingdom."

All he wanted was a beer
SAN ANTONIO: Felix Rivera's late-night craving for a cold beer landed him in jail, reports AP. Rivera, 33, greased his body with used cooking oil, then tried to slide through a 2-foot-wide (60-centimetre-wide) rooftop air vent into Pile Nix, a convenience store where he's a regular customer, police said. He tripped the burglar alarm early Friday when his upper body became wedged in the vent with his legs dangling inside. It took eight firefighters an hour to free Rivera. He walked up to me and said, "Sorry, man. All I wanted was a beer," store manager Joe Castellano said. "Because of the alarm, he was pretty deaf after he left." Rivera was charged with burglary and held on 10,000 dollar bond. Damage to the store was estimated at 1,000 dollars.

It would be tough for thief to hide the mascot
CALEDONIA, Ontario: Local police were searching for Ronald McDonald on Friday after a 6-foot (1.8-meter) fiberglass statue of the McDonald's restaurant mascot was stolen overnight from a restaurant, reports AP. "We're taking this seriously," said police Sgt Bill Renton, adding that the figurine of the clown was worth about 4,000 dollars. Renton was confident his officers would find the statue. "It would be kind of tough to hide," he said.

Netanyahu may meet Arafat face to face

Arab leaders warn Israeli govt of reconsidering promises

CAIRO, June 24: Arab leaders have warned Israel's new hardline government they will reconsider promises made in five years of Middle East peace talks if it tries to do the same, reports Reuters. At a weekend summit in Cairo they stipulated their price for peace with the Jewish state — full peaceful relations for Israel's complete withdrawal from occupied lands — and stated it was nothing more than what was agreed upon at a 1991 peace conference. But new Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose radical policies spurred the Arabs to set aside differences and meet for the first time in six years, said the summit set preconditions which threatened his country's security. The attempt to... dictate prior conditions that shake the security of Israel doesn't sit with true peace process," he said. "I see the attempt to create prior demands as a thing that does not help a peace process which all of us desire. "We won't dictate to them. They won't dictate to us," he told reporters in Kiryat Gat, southern Israel. Fourteen heads of state and representatives of seven other Arab states took part in the Cairo meeting — the first such summit since the 1990-91 Gulf crisis divided the Arab World. Iraq, which precipitated the crisis with its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, was not invited. Earlier this week, Netanyahu told the Arabs he was ready for peace, but on terms which reject a Palestinian state and also any withdrawal from occupied Arab lands. "This would lead to a setback in the peace process, with all the dangers and repercussions that implies, taking the region back to the cycle of tension," Arab leaders declared after long hours of debate. The Arab states would be

Netanyahu may meet Arafat face to face

Arab leaders warn Israeli govt of reconsidering promises

forced to reconsider the steps taken towards Israel in the framework of the peace process and the government of Israel alone would bear full responsibility," their final document said. "Achieving comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East requires that Israel withdraw from all occupied Palestinian land, including Arab Jerusalem, and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and set up an independent Palestinian state with Arab Jerusalem as its capital," said the statement. It stipulated complete Israeli withdrawal from Syria's Golan Heights and Southern Lebanon, which Israel flatly rejects for security reasons. AFP adds: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does not rule out meeting face to face with Palestinian authority President Yasser Arafat. Newsweek reported in editions released Sunday. "If I deem it important for Israel's security interests that I meet with Arafat, I will not rule it out," Netanyahu said.

Tale of India's youngest rights activist

NEW DELHI, June 24: At age 10, Asmita is India's youngest rights activist who in her spare time teaches basic education to child labourers freed from bondage by her crusading father, reports AFP. And after an incredible three years of exposure to child slavery, Asmita feels the problem can be eradicated if the government shows the will and people boycott goods produced by young hands. That's the message the bright sixth grade student gave to the 21st Convention of the Canadian Labour Congress at Vancouver, and a US congressional hearing organised by Congressman Joseph Kennedy last month. But I also told them that the West is responsible for child labour in the Third World, she said in an interview. Goods made by child labourers in South Asia are sold in the West. "The cruel employers in the Third World and the buyers in the West are the two ends of the thread in the chain of slavery," Asmita said, it can be ended, it should be ended. Asmita says she became aware of the extent of child slavery in India after hearing stories from her father, Kailash Satyarthi, who has been engaged in the freeing of poor children employed in hazardous industries. In 1993 she took part in a 1,600 kilometre (1,000 mile) march from the eastern province of Bihar to New Delhi organised by her father to highlight the plight of child labourers. The next year she joined a similar 5,200 kilometre (3,250 miles) march from the southern Indian town of Kanyakumari to New Delhi along with scores of young boys and girls from poor families. Along the way, she addressed numerous impromptu meetings urging Indians to boycott goods and services provided by children, and saw for the first time how people of her age toiled in stone quarries and fireworks factories. In New Delhi, she teaches Hindi language to several children rescued from carpet and Bangle industries by her father, who heads the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS).

Tale of India's youngest rights activist

awful of the extent of child slavery in India after hearing stories from her father, Kailash Satyarthi, who has been engaged in the freeing of poor children employed in hazardous industries. In 1993 she took part in a 1,600 kilometre (1,000 mile) march from the eastern province of Bihar to New Delhi organised by her father to highlight the plight of child labourers. The next year she joined a similar 5,200 kilometre (3,250 miles) march from the southern Indian town of Kanyakumari to New Delhi along with scores of young boys and girls from poor families. Along the way, she addressed numerous impromptu meetings urging Indians to boycott goods and services provided by children, and saw for the first time how people of her age toiled in stone quarries and fireworks factories. In New Delhi, she teaches Hindi language to several children rescued from carpet and Bangle industries by her father, who heads the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS).

Rains claim 43 in Rajasthan

NEW DELHI, June 24: The Indian Army was called out Sunday in the northern desert state of Rajasthan after 43 people died in heavy rains, pushing the nationwide toll to 326, domestic news agencies said, reports AFP. Soldiers rescued the marooned by boats while army helicopters dropped food packets to residents stranded on rooftops as major parts of the province reeled under flash floods caused by continuing downpour, officials said. More than 100 villages and towns in the sprawling state bordering Pakistan were under a sea of rain water, seriously disrupting road and train traffic and communications, the United News of India (UNI) reported. The flood waters were, however, receding in the northern state of Kashmir although the highway linking the Kashmir valley with the rest of India remained cut off for the third day, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

Rebel leader Pol Pot still alive

PAULIN, Cambodia, June 24: Pol Pot, the elusive leader of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge guerilla army, is still alive and playing a leading role in running the radical guerilla group, Khmer Rouge officials said, reports Reuters. He is still alive and travels from base to base giving morale support to the comrades, Colonel Arun, Deputy Commander of the Khmer Rouge Paulin region in western Cambodia, told Reuters on Sunday. Rumours that the 68-year-old Pol Pot had died of malaria in a jungle health zone began circulating in Phnom Penh and along the Thai-Cambodian border earlier this month. He has not been seen by an independent observer for more than 15 years. Khmer Rouge officials said they were amused to hear press reports that their leader was dead.

Gaddafi willing to hold direct talks with Clinton

DUSAI, June 24: Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi has expressed his willingness for direct talks with US President Bill Clinton, reports PTI. We have nothing against the American people and the US President Clinton is our friend, Col Gaddafi told CNN at Cairo where he was attending the Arab summit. The Libyan leader who flew into Cairo defying a UN ban on flights from Libya said he wanted to have direct talks with Clinton. But they do not listen, he told the television network, adding "But now he is watching us. I hope he is."

Succession fight brewing as Greeks pay last respects to Papandreou

ATHENS, June 24: Even as mourners lined up to pay their final respects to Andreas Papandreou, a succession fight was brewing — evidence of the former leader's tight grip on both the Socialist Party and the prime ministry, reports AP. Thousands of Greeks, some in tears and many holding flowers, arrived Sunday at the capital's main orthodox cathedral to pay homage to the popular 77-year-old leader, who died at home of heart failure earlier in the day. His body will lay in state at the cathedral until his funeral Wednesday, the casket draped in the blue and white Greek flag. Papandreou was premier from 1981-89 and again from October 1993 until he resigned in January for health reasons. The Panhellenic Socialist Movement went into emergency executive committee session Sunday after news of its founder's death. Papandreou died without resigning from his post as party leader. The executive committee decided to go ahead with a party congress scheduled to begin Thursday, where Papandreou was to be re-elected, unopposed. A leadership struggle that began when it became clear Papandreou's health was failing pits economic reformists against those in favour of continuing the former leader's easy-spending ways. The latter approach has been popular with voters. Papandreou's subordinates are engaged in a tussle for the position of deputy chairman, an office the Socialist Party created to preserve Papandreou's authority and at the same time pursue a successor. Premier Costas Simitis, a former party dissident, and Interior Minister Akis Tsochadzopoulos, a faithful Papandreou lieutenant, already have said they want the deputy chairmanship. Other candidates to lead the party may emerge with Papandreou's death. Papandreou and several confidants had been working on a speech just a few hours before his death. Neither the address nor his intentions had been made public. Papandreou's third wife, Dimitra, was among the first to arrive at the Cathedral, where people gathered to walk past Papandreou's coffin. Government ministers and high-ranking party members, including Simitis and Defence Minister Gerassimos Arsenis, stood next to the casket. Papandreou rose to power in the 1980s on a combination of anti-American rhetoric, generous social spending and educational reforms. His premiership ended in 1989 amid allegations of political scandals and a messy divorce from his wife of 38 years. But in October 1993, a year after major heart surgery, he returned the Socialist Party to power. He toned down his anti-American sloganeering and emphasised economic reform. Avoided by past US administrations, Papandreou met with President Clinton in 1994 on his first official visit to Washington. Clinton on Sunday extended his condolences to Papandreou's family and the Greek people. "Andreas Papandreou was one of the most influential political leaders in modern Greek history and was a key figure in assuring the triumph of democracy in the land of his birth," said White House spokesman Mike McCurry. Simitis cut short his participation in a European Union summit in Florence, Italy, to return to Athens. Leaders attending the 15-nation summit praised Papandreou's leadership. Even Greece's neighbour and long-time foe Turkey sent its sympathies, with Turkish caretaker premier Mesut Yilmaz describing Papandreou's death as "a great loss for the Greek people." "I believe that Papandreou wanted, from the bottom of his heart, peace between our two countries, despite the rhetoric," Yilmaz said in Florence, where he was an observer at the summit. He takes private lessons for one hour in the evening from an advocate fluent in both Hindi and English, they said.



Pope John Paul II descends from a helicopter at the Berlin-BelleVue Castle garden as he arrives for his second and last stop in Germany on Sunday. The Pontiff, who will later meet with German President Roman Herzog, is on a weekend visit to Germany, his first visit to the reunited Germany. — AFP/UNB photo

Deve Gowda learning Hindi

NEW DELHI, June 24: Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, a farmer's son from southern India, is taking lessons in the Lingua Franca of the politically important northern heartland to shore up his image as a national leader, reports AP. The India Express newspaper today quoted sources in the Prime Minister's office as saying that Deve Gowda had "returned to the classroom" to take lessons in Hindi, the national language of India. He takes private lessons for one hour in the evening from an advocate fluent in both Hindi and English, they said.