

BRRIEFLY

Floods claim 300 in China so far: More than 20 million people have been affected in the worst floods in half a century across southern and eastern China that have so far claimed more than 300 lives, reports said yesterday. AFP says from Beijing.

The floods, triggered by torrential rains earlier this week, have left hundreds of thousands homeless, swept away about 211,000 houses and severely damaged 510,000 more, the China Daily reported.

More than 1.3 million hectares (3.2 million acres) of farmland has been destroyed by a week of rain and by rivers that have burst their banks and left 1.2 million people in 3,094 villages stranded, the paper reported.

Rafsanjani congratulates Yeltsin: Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on Friday welcomed Russian President Boris Yeltsin's re-election, the official IRNA news agency reported. AFP says from Tehran.

In a congratulatory message to the Kremlin, Rafsanjani said Yeltsin's victory in Tuesday's second round election runoff was proof of the "approval of the Russian nation for his policies," the agency said.

Rafsanjani said Yeltsin's policies were aimed "not only on the development and prosperity of his country, but also at the establishment of peace and stability in the region and in the world, on the basis of mutual respect."

Suharto leaves for Germany today: President Suharto will leave for Hanover, Germany, on Sunday for a medical check-up, a presidential palace official said Saturday. AP reports from Jakarta.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the special plane that will fly the president and his family, will take off from the Jakarta military airport of Halim Perdanakusuma at 09:00 pm (1400 GMT), Sunday. On Friday, Cabinet spokesman Mardiono announced Suharto would go abroad for a medical check-up but refused to confirm that he will be seeking treatment for kidney stones.

2 killed in NZ chopper crash: A civilian pilot and his army officer passenger were killed Saturday when a helicopter crashed on the central North Island, army officials said. AP reports from Auckland.

The Marine Helicopters Ltd. Hughes 300 helicopter crashed in a deep gully between Taihape and Wairoa, army spokesman Major Fiona Cassidy said. Another army officer was seriously injured but is expected to survive. Names of dead or injured were not released. The two officers were carrying out land reconnaissance for an army exercise when the helicopter went down.

Oldest German woman dies at 111: Karolina Kruger, Germany's oldest resident who credited her longevity to a healthy enjoyment of food and wine, has died of heart attack at the age of 111, her family announced Friday. AFP reports from Münster.

"After a small coronary followed by pneumonia, she fell peacefully asleep on Wednesday forever," her 80-year-old daughter Ruth Puffert said. Born in Trier, southwest Germany on February 17, 1885, Kruger remembered waving a flag to salute Emperor William II as a schoolgirl. She called this "the most beautiful memory of my childhood."

8 drown as boat capsizes in India: A shoddy rowboat capsized in a northern India river on Friday, killing eight teen-agers, police said. AP reports from Amritsar.

Rescuers saved five teens from the Beas river near Amritsar, a Sikh holy town in northern state of Punjab, said L D Hans, additional deputy commissioner. Police retrieved the eight bodies — five boys and three girls from the water. The teen-agers decided to go boating after visiting a Sikh shrine in Goidwal, 35 kilometers (20 miles) southeast of Amritsar, Hans said.

Estonia detains 2 DPRK diplomats: Two North Korean diplomats have been detained in Estonia for trying to smuggle 75,000 dollars worth of cigarettes into Sweden, the Swedish news agency reported Friday. AFP reports from Stockholm.

The two diplomats — the third secretary and an attache at the Embassy in Stockholm were about to drive a van into a ferry heading from Tallinn to Stockholm when Estonian customs authorities asked to inspect the vehicle. The Koreans refused saying they were protected by diplomatic immunity and carrying only diplomatic correspondence from Moscow.

Rare AIDS case found in US: Scientists have identified a Los Angeles-area woman as the first person in the United States known to carry a rare strain of the AIDS virus, a finding that will force changes in HIV screening tests to protect the nation's blood supply, AP reports from Atlanta.

The rare form of HIV, called Group O, escapes detection by current antibody tests in about one of every five cases, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Friday. Antibody tests failed to detect the virus in the Los Angeles County woman even though she had what appeared to be AIDS symptoms.



Israeli soldiers patrol the streets of Hebron in the West Bank Friday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is due to take a decision on the long-delayed Israeli troop withdrawal from the flashpoint town of Hebron before a visit to the United States next week. — AFP/UNB photo.

Tajik rebels preparing for border attacks

MOSCOW, July 6: More than 1,700 Tajik rebels are concentrating in Afghanistan and preparing to break through into Tajikistan in three places, the deputy head of Russian border troops said Friday, reports AP.

Russian troops on the Tajik-Afghan border are ready to use all forces and means in case of provocations on the part of the rebels," Alexei Kozhevnikov said at a news conference, according to the Interfax news agency.

Moscow has 25,000 troops in Tajikistan to help prop up the hard-line government and guard the border against rebels.

YANGON, July 6: Myanmar's generals vowed that if they caught him they would hang him. But more than six months after the opium warlord surrendered to Myanmar's army (the question remains: Where is Khun Sa?) reports AP.

He's wanted in a US court on 10 counts of heroin and narcotics trafficking, and he hasn't been seen since Myanmar's military government took him into custody and disbanded more than 10,000 of his troops in January.

But international narcotics agents say his signature neighbourhood product — cheap and potent heroin — is flooding from America to Australia at record levels.

When the generals arrested 262 followers of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in late May, they drew a barrage of international condemnation. The political turmoil also shifted the spotlight away from questions about Khun Sa, whether the junta plans to make good on its promise to punish him and why huge quantities of drugs still flow from Myanmar.

A slight 61-year-old man with a penchant for military fatigues, Khun Sa may not have been seen recently, but his name is heard often around Yangon. Rumors fly about his whereabouts, doings and dealings.

The United States has offered \$2 million for Khun Sa's capture and has asked Myanmar to extradite him to face drug trafficking charges. Myanmar has refused, saying he will be dealt with under Burmese law.

Technically, Khun Sa has been defeated. But he's more of a phantom now than he was as a criminal at large, when he reigned over the isolated jungles of Shan State and occasionally gave interviews to reporters who made the arduous eight-hour mule ride from the Thai border to his headquarters in Homong.

Khun Sa claims his rebel army was fighting for the autonomy of his Shan ethnic minority. American officials say he was one of the biggest drug traffickers in the Golden Triangle, a mountainous jungle where the borders of Burma, Thailand and Laos meet. About 60 per cent of

Charles, Di look set to untie their wedding-knot

LONDON, July 6: Prince Charles and Princess Diana look set to agree an end to their 15-year marriage as early as next week, reports Reuter.

After 10 weeks of bitter wrangling, Charles is believed to have made a "clean break" offer of up to 20 million pounds (30 million dollars) to the glamorous princess he married in a fairytale wedding that turned sour.

Sources close to the estranged couple say they could reach agreement and make a joint statement on Monday, ending one of the sorriest chapters in the history of the House of Windsor.

Diana's lawyer Anthony Julius discussed Charles' offer with her on Friday and the ball is now in Diana's court. If she accepts, the marriage could be annulled within two months.

"Proper consideration will be given to the proposals that have been made," Julius told reporters.

Both sides refused to comment on the details, but Charles was said to have preferred making a "drip feed" annual allowance offer Diana stuck to her demand for a lump sum.

Soon after landing in Srinagar, Gowda hopped into an army helicopter with the state governor and began a survey of areas hit by recent floods.

Government officials refused to give details of Gowda's visit, citing security concerns.

When news of Gowda's visit spread at dawn, shopkeepers immediately pulled down the shutters, saying they rejected the federal government's plans to hold state legislature elections.

Some shopkeepers said on condition of anonymity that elections to the state would not solve the problems of Kash-

miris, many of whom allege that the federal government denies them their religious rights.

Kashmir is the only Muslim-dominated state in India, a predominantly Hindu nation of 930 million people. The federal government says it is secular and guarantees the religious rights of all people.

In frequent gun battles between militants and security forces in the last six years, more than 14,500 people have been killed.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over the disputed state of Kashmir, which they both claim.

India also accuses Pakistan of training and arming Muslim guerrillas to fight a proxy war with New Delhi. Islamabad denies that charge and says it only gives moral support to the guerrillas.

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Netanyahu to decide on troops pullout from WB after US visit

JERUSALEM, July 6: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will decide whether to pull Israeli troops out of the West Bank town of Hebron after his return from the United States, her interior security minister said Friday.

Avigdor Kahalani said the matter would be discussed by the Israeli Cabinet on Netanyahu's return next week.

Netanyahu is due to go to Washington on Monday, his first foreign trip since his May 29 election victory.

Hebron, where 400 militant Jewish settlers live among 120,000 Palestinians, is the only major West Bank town still under Israeli occupation.

Under the Israeli-Palestinian autonomy agreements the Jewish state was to pull its troops out of four fifths of the town by March 28 but former Prime Minister Shimon Peres postponed the pullback after a wave of Islamic suicide bombings in Israel.

Palestinian activists distributed leaflets last week calling on Arabs to make next Tuesday the start of a new intifada if Netanyahu does not take a decision beforehand.

The Israeli leader is meetings US President Bill Clinton in Washington the same day.

Beggar's donation

NEW DELHI, July 6: A 67-year-old blind beggar in the Indian city of Cuttack donated about 110,000 rupees (3,100 dollars) accumulated over years to a Hindu temple, United News of India said yesterday, reports AP.

Dhadi Swain, who has been begging 10 hours a day for some 40 years, gave the money to the new Jagannath shrine in Cuttack, Orissa state, the news agency said.

Swain lost his eyesight after a childhood attack of smallpox.

China warns Uygurs against move for independence

ALMAATA, July 6: Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen admitted Friday Beijing had a problem with Muslim separatists in its Central Asian Xinjiang province, but warned ethnic Uygurs there against pushing for independence, reports AP.

"Yes there is an organisation called 'Eastern Turkestan' or 'Uyghurstan' and our government is opposed to separatist activities, whatever they may be," Qian told a press conference here.

Former Soviet Central Asian heads of state have given the Chinese government their support on this issue," added Qian, who is accompanying Chinese President Jiang Zemin, who began Thursday a state visit to Kazakhstan.

Uygur moderates have set up, in Kazakhstan, which shares a 1,700 kilometre (1,000 mile) border with China, where exile groups claim the Chinese authorities have rounded up more than 5,000 Muslim activists in Xinjiang province over the last two months.

Strike to protest Gowda's visit cripples Kashmir

Srinagar, July 6: A strike by businesses on Saturday shut down Srinagar, capital of Jammu-Kashmir state, to protest the first official visit by a prime minister since the Muslim insurrection began there six years ago, reports AP.

Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's visit to the state capital, the seat of the movement for independence of the state, was kept secret until the morning to prevent rebel attacks.

Soon after landing in Srinagar, Gowda hopped into an army helicopter with the state governor and began a survey of areas hit by recent floods.

Government officials refused to give details of Gowda's visit, citing security concerns.

When news of Gowda's visit spread at dawn, shopkeepers immediately pulled down the shutters, saying they rejected the federal government's plans to hold state legislature elections.

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Italian fashion designer Gianfranco Ferré shown in file photo dated March 15 1995 waving at the end of a fashion show in Paris. Ferré will no longer design clothes for the Christian Dior fashion house after this year, Dior chairman Francois Baufume announced Friday. The collaboration had been complicated lately by Ferré's involvement in his own fashion house. — AFP/UNB photo

Yeltsin supporters launch bid to form anti-Communist front in Duma

MOSCOW, July 6: Russian President Boris Yeltsin's supporters in parliament seeking to keep up momentum after the election victory over Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, have launched a bid to form an anti-Communist front in parliament, reports Reuter.

As world leaders showered congratulations on the Kremlin leader and concerns over Yeltsin's health faded into the background, attention switched to the harsh post election realities of a divided country beset with social and economic problems.

Prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's government met on Friday to discuss its challenges, especially improving tax collection to avoid a budget crisis. "The government must work calmly," he said.

But political intrigue started afresh at the State Duma (lower chamber of Parliament) where the pro-Yeltsin Our Home is Russia faction announced that it planned to form an alliance with other centrist and liberal groups.

But it was not clear if they would be able to muster enough votes to counter the powerful Communists and their allies.

Zyuganov's leftist coalition of National Patriotic Forces was due to discuss its post-election strategy on Saturday.

The bloc failed to get its man into the Kremlin but could still prove troublesome on the legislative front. However, the Duma has relatively little power under Russia's constitution and may not have the stomach to take on the recharged Yeltsin.

Our Home is Russia leader

Sergei Belyayev said they might even try to replace Communist Duma chairman Gennady Seleznyov.

But one potential coalition partner, the centrist Russian Regions faction, opposed any such attempt to oust Seleznyov.

"We have never set ourselves the goal of replacing the Speaker.

Interfax news agency quoted Belyayev as saying he was counting on security more than half of the votes in the chamber.

But it was not clear where these votes would come from. It seemed likely that the coalition would depend on support from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party and a substantial number of independent deputies.

LONDON, July 6: A senior Russian official said Friday that a Cold War treaty of friendship with North Korea signed exactly 35 years ago, would not be renewed and that a new treaty was needed, ITAR-Tass said in a report monitored here, reports AP.

The news agency said Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksander Panov told it on Friday at a reception at the North Korean embassy in Moscow that Russia was waiting for North Korea to respond to a new draft treaty. He said the old treaty had "fulfilled its historic role."

"Moscow does not consider that the revision of the treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance of July 6, 1961 between the USSR and the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) upsets the balance of forces on the Korean Peninsula," Itar-Tass said, quoting Panov.

Panov said that quite different conditions exist compared with those under which the treaty was signed and that Moscow had informed Pyongyang last year that it would not be extending the treaty this year when the five-year extension signed September 10, 1991 runs out.

The new treaty proposed by Russia removes references to a commitment as an ally to come to the defence of North Korea if it suffers aggression.

Panov said Russia was waiting for North Korea to respond to its new draft treaty. "So far the Russian party has received no answer, but we hope to receive it soon," he said.

Panov described Russia's relationship with South Korea as good.

Witness puts Serb Gen Mladic at Srebrenica massacres

THE HAGUE, July 6: Chilling testimony provided the most direct evidence yet of the Bosnian Serb military commander's alleged participation in the mass execution of Muslims. A man identified as Witness A on Friday described playing dead as he peered up from beneath a pile of bleeding bodies and saw Bosnian Serb Gen. Ratko Mladic watching the slaughter, reports AP.

Another witness, Drazen Erdemovic, said he personally participated in the slaughter of up to 1,200 Srebrenica Muslims. His testimony gave the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal the fullest picture yet of atrocities committed after Bosnian Serb soldiers overran the UN-protected enclave of Srebrenica in July 1995.

The two men's descriptions came at an evidence hearing against Mladic and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic designed to put more international pressure on them to surrender.

The UN tribunal has indicted them on counts of genocide and crimes against humanity for allegedly masterminding a wave of atrocities during the 3 and half year Bosnian conflict. Witness A's testimony provided the most direct link so far between Mladic and the Srebrenica killings.

Both men remain at large in Bosnian Serb territory, where they continue to wield influence and undermine the Dayton peace accord.

"I saw him (Mladic) watching Serb soldiers bringing us there, lining us up, and killing us," Witness A told the tribunal. He said he had seen Mladic five other times in the enclave after its fall.

Mladic has been singled out as the man who orchestrated the alleged massacres at Srebrenica, which his indictment called "the most horrendous, unimaginable war crimes committed in Europe since the end of World War II."

More than 6,000 Muslim refugees from the area are still missing, believed slaughtered by rebel Serbs and buried in mass graves.

The tribunal said the exhumation of suspected mass graves in Bosnia and Croatia would begin this weekend.

The exhumations, which could provide prosecutors with new evidence to bolster their cases against Karadzic and Mladic, are expected to last up to three months.

Those sympathetic to the regime say the generals are doing the right thing with Khun Sa, but look like hypocrites because of previous pledges never to deal with him.

Critics accuse the generals, who are desperate for foreign exchange to fund their military buildup, of laundering Khun Sa's drug money.

Military officials have denied this charge, but they've granted amnesty to other major drug traffickers, such as Lo Hsing Han, and helped them convert their black fortune into legal businesses. A company belonging to Lo's son is building a hotel and port in Yangon.

Rangoon residents say Khun Sa has his own bus line linking Myanmar with Thailand and China, the two principal routes for heroin leaving the country. They say he has gem mines, clothing shops, restaurants and a share in a five-star hotel near Suu Kyt's home.

BRUSSELS, July 6: The European Union is "deeply concerned at the continuing deterioration of the political situation in Myanmar" and at restrictions on fundamental freedoms imposed by the ruling junta, a statement from the Irish EU presidency said Friday, reports AP.

In the statement, the EU expressed "continued strong concern with regard to restrictions on the fundamental rights of freedom of speech, movement and association."

The EU urged the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) "to implement without delay respect for human rights" and to "release immediately and unconditionally those members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) who are still detained" and to respect the outcome of elections won by the NLD in May 1990.

Last week's blast at Dhahran 'Bombers may have had help from Syria'

WASHINGTON, July 6: The bombers who triggered an explosion that killed 19 US servicemen in Saudi Arabia last week may have had help from Syria, ABC Television reported Friday, reports AP.

A Saudi delegation was in Damascus demanding information Friday, saying material used in the blast appears to have been from Syria and that the assailants may have been trained there, ABC reported.

The United States offered a reward of up to two million dollars Tuesday for information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the Khobar blast.

The Pentagon meanwhile denied assertions that Saudi officials had rejected requests to expand a key security zone, which might have reduced that number of casualties in the explosion at the US military housing complex.

The United States, hoping to tighten security for its troops after a terrorist blast killed 19 US servicemen in Saudi Arabia, may redeploy force from the Saudi Capital, Defence Secretary William Perry said.

The redeployment would involve moving some of the 1,500 US troops from Riyadh elsewhere in the desert kingdom, Perry told reporters in Germany on his way home from a visit with US troops in Bosnia.

But the defence secretary rejected suggestions that Washington might cut its overall military forces in Saudi Arabia, according to a transcript of his remarks made available by the Pentagon.

"We're not going to cut and run from Saudi Arabia," he said. "We are not planning a reduction in forces because of the bombing."

US officials were shaken by the June 25 bombing of a housing complex for US military personnel in which 19 Americans were killed.

Plans to reassign some American troops were "under consideration" before the bombing, and we'll intensify that consideration, moving some of the forces out of Riyadh," Perry said.

Itar-Tass said, quoting Panov.

Panov said that quite different conditions exist compared with those under which the treaty was signed and that Moscow had informed Pyongyang last year that it would not be extending the treaty this year when the five-year extension signed September 10, 1991 runs out.

The new treaty proposed by Russia removes references to a commitment as an ally to come to the defence of North Korea if it suffers aggression.

Panov said Russia was waiting for North Korea to respond to its new draft treaty. "So far the Russian party has received no answer, but we hope to receive it soon," he said.

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Off the Record

3-yr hunt for the tallest & shortest

KUALA LUMPUR: After a three-year hunt, researchers for a book of records say they have found Malaysia's shortest woman and the tallest man. Bernama news agency reported Friday, says AP.

The 22-year-old Rohaya Ismail stands 99.06 centimetres (3 feet 3 inches) and works as a production operator in Johor Bahru, a border town near Singapore, Bernama said.

At the other end is Hoo Sun Foe, a 50-year-old truck driver whose employer had to modify his vehicle cabin to give him more head space and leg room.

Hoo is 2.04 metres (6 feet 9 inches) tall and lives in Selama, 150 kilometres (90 miles) north of Kuala Lumpur, Bernama said.

It said they were found by a group of researchers for the Malaysia Book of Records which was launched three years ago on the suggestion of some Cabinet ministers.

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Russia won't renew friendship treaty with DPRK

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EU deeply concerned at political crisis in Myanmar

BRUSSELS, July 6: The European Union is "deeply concerned at the continuing deterioration of the political situation in Myanmar" and at restrictions on fundamental freedoms imposed by the ruling junta, a statement from the Irish EU presidency said Friday, reports AP.

In the statement, the EU expressed "continued strong concern with regard to restrictions on the fundamental rights of freedom of speech, movement and association."

The EU urged the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) "to implement without delay respect for human rights" and to "release immediately and unconditionally those members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) who are still detained" and to respect the outcome of elections won by the NLD in May 1990.

It is the first visit to the troubled Kashmir Valley by an Indian prime minister since a bloody Muslim separatist drive broke out in 1989. The campaign has left more than 12,000 people dead.

Deve Gowda, who heads a centre-left coalition in New Delhi, is officially coming to the valley to assess the widespread havoc caused by floods which have killed 43 people in Kashmir.

But Muslim militants said the trip was aimed at preparing the ground for elections to the Kashmir Assembly and called for a protest strike that crippled the picturesque valley.

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Muslims-Croats agree on defence bill

LONDON, July 6: Bosnian Muslims and Croats have agreed on a defence bill that will merge their military forces in a single army, Bosnian television said Friday in a report monitored by the BBC, says AP.

The text was agreed at intensive talks among officials of the Muslim-Croat federation, namely Cyprus