

BRIEFLY



Koko Morinoue (L) and Dr Yamaoka Tetsuya are garlanded with flowers and currency notes during their wedding July 16 in New Delhi. The couple, both from Tokyo, Japan, and being extremely fond of India decided to wed in the traditional Hindu custom. — AFP photo

Drugs seized in Tokyo: Police seized more than 500 kg (1,100lb) of amphetamine in Yokohama in the largest confiscation of its kind on record in Japan, police sources said yesterday. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Customs officials at the port of Yokohama, near Tokyo, last week found 250 kg (550 lb) of amphetamine packed inside cans of cooked bamboo shoots imported from a southeast Asian country.

New Russian defence minister: Russian President Boris Yeltsin yesterday appointed General Igor Rodionov, chief of the general staff academy, as new defence minister, the Kremlin press service said. Reuter reports from Moscow.

Rodionov, 59, and a career military man, replaces Hawkish Pavel Grachev whom Yeltsin sacked on June 18. Rodionov will take over from the Caretaker minister, chief of the general staff Mikhail Klesnikov.

Forest fire rages in Brazil park: A forest fire has charred 32,000 to 37,000 acres (13,000 and 15,000 hectares) in a national park in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, firefighters said. AP reports from Brazil.

While no one has been injured by the blaze in the Serra Lanstra national park, damage to the land is considerable, Sgt Jose Reis Mattos, a fireman in the nearby city of Passos, said Tuesday.

7 Congress workers held in Delhi: Seven Congress workers, including Delhi Youth Congress-I president, Jagdish Yadav were arrested when supporters of two rival groups clashed outside the official residence of senior Congress leader, Pranab Mukherjee, Thursday evening, PTI reports from New Delhi.

The DCP New Delhi district, Dr Aditya Arya said the incident took place when two supporters of the dissident group shouted anti-Rao slogans outside the residence of Mukherjee, where an informal CWC meeting was in progress.

Indian FF Dr Aruna improving: Renowned freedom fighter, Dr Aruna Asaf Ali, was shifted out of the Intensive Care Unit of the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in New Delhi Tuesday, PTI reports from New Delhi.

Her condition was better, Dr S P Aggarwal, medical superintendent of the hospital, said. "She has been shifted to a room but is being fed through a tube," he said.

Gore visits Kovalyev in Russia: US Vice President Al Gore paid a 30 minute hospital visit to Sergei Kovalyev, a former human rights adviser to President Boris Yeltsin who resigned his Kremlin post in protest over the war in Chechnya, Reuter reports from Moscow.

Kovalyev has been hospitalised after suffering a heart attack and Gore wanted to visit him out of respect for Russia's leading human rights activist, said Press Secretary Peggy Wilhide, who was travelling with Gore.

Assam floods death toll 20: The flood situation in Assam continued to remain grim as nearly two million people of nine districts of the state were affected and the death toll rose to twenty, PTI reports from Guwahati.

Officials sources said in Guwahati that the Brahmaputra and its tributaries continued to rise in most places as hundreds of villages were under water in Dhemaj, Lakhimpur and Nalbari districts. The death toll rose to 20 with report of one more death from Nalbari district. Unconfirmed reports said that two children were washed away by flood water in the same district.

Amr Mussa back home: Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mussa returned in Cairo late Tuesday from Moscow where he won a Russian call for Israel to push forward the peace process, AFP reports from Cairo.

Mussa told journalists at Cairo airport upon arrival that his two day visit to Moscow was "very good and positive." It has shown that Russo-Egyptian relations are in a good state of movement. The Russian role as a co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process will be reactivated, Mussa said.

US envoy urges India, Pakistan to resolve crisis

QUETTA, Pakistan, July 17: I have come here today because of my conviction that India and Pakistan, the two dominant nations of South Asia, have greatness within their grasp, US Ambassador to India Frank Wisner said in remarks to the Command and Staff College in Quetta, Pakistan on July 10, reports AP.

I have come here to urge you, as I do every day with Indians, to seize the opportunity you have before you, to bring an end to the generations of animosity and mistrust that have been permitted to define your bilateral relationship, Wisner told the gathering of defence officials.

"The tragedy of South Asian politics is not that brothers divide," Wisner said. "The tragedy is the inability of the political leadership of India and Pakistan to build an effective constituency for peace. I believe there is a perceptible desire for peace on both sides of the border."

Wisner said the United States — indeed, all friends of India and Pakistan — welcome the overture from Pakistan's Prime Minister to the new Indian government of Deve Gowda to resume discussions on the entire range of issues between the two countries.

While acknowledging that the United States has found "common ground" with Pakistan and India over the decades, Wisner said "The truth is, as our relationships grow in breadth and complexity, the likelihood also grows of divergent opinions surfacing."

"One of the issues in which the United States has differences with both Pakistan and India is on the most effective

Protection from further terrorist attack
US likely to shift substantial number of troops within KSA

WASHINGTON, July 17: The US military said on Tuesday it expected to announce soon a plan to shift a substantial number of American troops within Saudi Arabia to protect them better from terrorist attack, reports Reuter.

The move, which the Pentagon predicted will be supported by Saudi leaders, would follow the June 25 truck bombing of a military complex near Dhahran that killed 19 US airmen and injured hundreds of others.

Those plans have been under discussion within Centcom (the US Central Command) and between Centcom and Saudi Arabia. Defence Department spokesman Ken Bacon said.

"I expect that we will have details to announce soon on a possible movement of US troops, in the end, I believe a

fairly substantial number of our troops will be moved," he said.

The United States has 5,000 troops stationed in the kingdom and wants to move some from high-profile bases such as an airbase near Dhahran to more remote facilities for their protection.

Five American troops also were killed in a car bomb blast at a base in Riyadh last November.

US officials have expressed concern about Saudi cooperation with American investigators in the June blast, but Bacon said the Saudis have recently expressed a strong desire to help protect American troops.

The official Saudi press agency reported over the weekend that Defence Minister Prince Sultan said Riyadh did not favour the Pentagon proposal to move



Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic (L) shakes hands with US envoy Richard Holbrooke (R) who arrived in Sarajevo Tuesday on the first leg of a pre-Bosnian elections Balkan tour to obtain the ouster of indicted war criminals General Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, leader of the Bosnian Serb ruling party. — AFP/UNB photo

If indicted Serb criminals allowed to take part
Bosnian Muslims threaten to boycott polls

SARAJEVO, July 17: Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic warned visiting US peacemaker Richard Holbrooke on Tuesday that Muslims may boycott postwar elections if indicted Serb war criminals are allowed to take part, reports Reuter.

Holbrooke, architect of the 1995 Dayton peace treaty for Bosnia, returned to the region on Monday to rescue sagging international efforts to remove separatist Serb leader Radovan Karadzic from political life.

The multi aim of Holbrooke's mission was to lean on President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, the Bosnian Serb's patron to depose Karadzic while the west debates how best to arrest him for trial before a UN tribunal.

Izetbegovic said that while NATO peace troops had separated Bosnia's ethnic armies admirable many civilian aspects of the Dayton accord had not been implemented.

Meanwhile international war crimes investigators said on Tuesday they had exhumed 86 bodies from a mass grave of Muslims machinegunned by Serb forces near the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica a year ago.

"There are up to 30 more still buried here," said team leader William Haglund after a ninth day of arduous, grisly labour to excavate the first of several suspected mass tombs in support of indictments against Serb commanders.

Around 8,000 Muslims went missing after separatist

Serbs overran Srebrenica, a Muslim-populated government enclave in eastern Bosnia that was designated a UN "safe area."

Witnesses have told the International Criminal Tribunal on former Yugoslavia (ICTY) that many Muslim men were executed as prisoners or killed in ambushes as they fled the region.

The ICTY, based in The Hague, has indicted Bosnian Serb political leader Radovan Karadzic and army chief General Ratko Mladic for alleged genocide and crimes against humanity.

Investigators tolled on Tuesday in muggy heat and torrential rain to lift the often skeletal, crumbling bodies out of trenches



US pop star Michael Jackson performs before an estimated audience of 60,000 in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo

29 killed in HK hotel fire

HONG KONG, July 17: At least 29 people were killed in a fire which broke out early today in a hotel in southern China's Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, officials said, reports AP.

Thirteen others were injured in the fire when they jumped from windows in the hotel in Shenzhen at the border with Hong Kong, the officials said.

They said the fire broke out in the hotel's restaurant and has been extinguished.

There were some 200 guests staying at the hotel at the time of the fire, they added.

Local authorities were carrying investigating the cause of the fire.

Israel to ease blockade of WB, Gaza Strip

JERUSALEM, July 17: The Israeli government decided Tuesday to ease the 19-week blockade of the West Bank and Gaza Strip which has kept tens of thousands of Palestinians from their jobs and restricted the flow of goods, reports AP.

The decision came two days before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was to meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to discuss the future of Israeli-Palestinian peace-making.

Also Tuesday, a Palestinian official said Yasser Arafat refused to take a call from Netanyahu's foreign policy adviser, Dore Gold, who was trying to set up a meeting with the Palestinian leader.

Later Tuesday, Israel Television reported that Gold met in Jerusalem with Mahmoud Abbas, the No 2 man in the PLO. The report said the talks were in preparation for a meeting soon between Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Arafat. No other details of their discussion were available.

Indian SC rules Asking for dowry an offence

NEW DELHI, July 17: India's supreme court has ruled that asking for dowry is an offence, toughening a 1961 law which declared dowries illegal, reports AP.

Judges A S Anand and M K Mukherjee said in a ruling Tuesday that "demand for dowry" was in itself a violation of the dowry prohibition act.

The supreme court ruling came in a case in which a young man who had entered the prestigious Indian administrative service (IAS) appealed against his imprisonment on charges that he had demanded dowry of his fiancée's family.

IAS officers, doctors and other professionals command huge sums in dowry in pre-nuptial negotiations for marriages contracted in the traditional manner.

The practice of paying dowry remains widespread in India despite being declared illegal.

Social activists say that ambiguously-worded anti-dowry legislation, a time-consuming judiciary and outdated social mores are responsible for the practice continuing.

Jackson steals the show

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Brunei, July 17: Pop King Michael Jackson burst on a stage under a rain of gold and white sparklers to sing, moon-walk and dance for the world's richest man and his subjects on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Jackson entertained about 60,000 people in the tiny oil rich kingdom of Brunei in a two-hour show sponsored by the state for the 50th birthday of its ruler, Sir Hassanah Bolkiah.

According to Fortune magazine, Hassanah is the world's richest man, worth 40 billion.

Brunei which also invited Prince Charles to the celebrations was believed to be paying Jackson between 15 million dollar and 20 million, government sources said.

The American star performed 15 songs, including hits such as "Billie Jean", "Thriller", "You're not alone" and "Black and white", at a Disney Land-style park where all rides and shows are free.

BJP MPS asked to declare assets within 30 days

NEW DELHI July 17: All Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Members of Parliament have been asked to declare their assets within 30 days to the party president, L K Advani, reports PTI.

Stating this here yesterday the party's Deputy leader in Lok Sabha, Jaswant Singh said this was to ensure transparency in public life promised by the party in its election manifesto.

He said the Members of Parliament have been advised to submit lists of their assets to Advani through him.

The party would also be holding a two-day workshop on August three and four for its new members of parliament numbering 85, Ram Naik said.

This was decided at the parliamentary party meeting held this morning, he said.

A legal committee headed by Ghuman Mal Lodha has been formed to examine bills presented in parliament with Satyapal Jain as its convener, Naik said.

Legal campaign for Di's royal status launched

LONDON, July 17: A British newspaper launched a legal campaign on Wednesday to regain Princess Diana's royal status and title after she resigned as patron of nearly 100 charities, reports Reuter.

The Daily Mirror, a top selling tabloid, said it had written to Queen Elizabeth's proctor, who represents the monarchy in matrimonial matters urging him to intervene in the divorce proceedings and restore to Diana the title 'her royal highness'.

"We have asked for a postponement of the decree absolute — due on August 28 until Diana's royal status is restored," the newspaper said, urging readers to sign a petition.

It claimed Diana's decision to trim her charity work was directly due to the loss of her title and change in status as part of the divorce agreement.

The Daily Mirror believes that the removal of the title is damaging to the public interest, and goes against public opinion, the newspaper's editor Piers Morgan said.



The charities were left shocked and saddened by Diana's surprise announcement, which came just a day after the start of her divorce proceedings from Prince Charles.

Off the Record

Dogs save 350 villagers

CHUANABHATI: The belief that dogs bark before any natural calamity saved the lives of 350 hill people of Chukhlim Basti of landside hit Kalimpong sub-division on Friday last, reports PTI.

A survivor, the headman of the gram panchayat, Ratna Ahrdur Gurung, said that as dogs barked at midnight on that day, all 350 villagers led by him, ran more than a kilometre in heavy rains to a safer place.

After an hour, a big chunk of rock slid down the river and 13 houses, including Gurung's, were completely buried under the debris and 33 others were severely damaged.

Fossil of prehistoric Peruvian horse found

LIMA: A group of French scientists said on Thursday they had found the fossil of a prehistoric horse that roamed the Peruvian coast up to 23,000 years ago, reports Reuter.

The scientists discovered the fossil as they scoured the coastal desert around Trujillo, 360 miles (570 kms) north of Lima, while searching for clues about the region's first human inhabitants.

The group has also discovered incomplete fossils of an elephant like mastodont, a fox and a deer, which lived in the area 4,000 years before the first humans, said anthropologist Calude Chauca.

"According to our investigations there seems to be no connection between the animals and humans," the scientist said.

Global ban on N-tests

Japanese FM calls on India to ease objections

TOKYO, July 17: Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda today called on India to ease in the coming weeks its objection to a global ban on nuclear tests, a report said, says AP.

"I strongly hope that every country will deal constructively and flexibly with the issue by the time a third round of the conference on disarmament convenes in late July," Ikeda was quoted by the Kyodon Ikeda, who mentioned India by name, also reiterated Japan's appeal to China to desist from carrying out a nuclear test by September, the report said.

China says it will be the last it will conduct before the treaty is wrapped up.

Ikeda was speaking at the start of an annual conference on disarmament hosted by Japan under the aegis of the United Nations.

The forum, gathering 62 diplomats, academics, government officials and experts, is taking place this year in Hiroshima, which alternates with Nagasaki as the venue.

Both cities suffered atomic bomb blasts by US forces during World War II.

He was to attend the Hiroshima Forum but called off at the last moment, saying that he was too busy with the treaty talks to attend.

Besides India, several other countries have objected to proposed conditions for setting compliance with the treaty that include intrusive inspection of nuclear facilities in so-called "threshold" countries considered on the brink of acquiring a nuclear arsenal.

Jordanian PM holds talks with Netanyahu

TEL AVIV, July 17: Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel Kajim Kabariti held surprise talks here late Tuesday with Benjamin Netanyahu amid fears for the future of the Middle East peace process, reports AP.

Kabariti, making the first visit by an Arab minister to Israel since the victory of right wing, nationalist leader Netanyahu in the May 29 election, spent 90 minutes with the Israeli Premier.

"I came here because we are very concerned for the peace process, said Kabariti after the meeting at the Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv.

But Kabariti said he was heartened by assurances given to him by Netanyahu that Israel would respect its commitments agreed in accords with the Jordanians, Palestinians and Egyptians.

Since Netanyahu's surprise election victory over peace architect Shimon Peres, Jordan

Clinton launching int'l campaign to pressure Castro on democracy

WASHINGTON, July 17: President Clinton is launching an international campaign to pressure Fidel Castro into moving toward democracy and a better life for Cubans, reports USIS.

The president will soon name a special envoy to coordinate the drive, and, using the possibility of damage suits against some foreign companies doing business in Cuba, will try to persuade other nations to join the United States in driving Havana along the path of political and economic reform.

"The time has come," Clinton said in a written statement announcing his decision on implementing Title III of the Helms-Burton Act. "For our allies and friends to do more — to join us in taking concrete steps to promote democracy in Cuba."

The president said he will allow the provisions of Title III to come into force. As a result all companies doing business in Cuba are hereby on notice that by trafficking in expropriated American property, they face the prospect of lawsuits and significant liability in the United States.