

BRIEFLY

Cholera kills 1800 in Nigeria: A cholera epidemic has killed more than 500 people in the northeastern Nigerian state of Borno since early June, medical officials said Thursday. AFP reports from Lagos.

The Borno deaths brings to more than 1,800 the fatality toll across Nigeria since the start of the year, with the epidemic affecting more than half of the West African country's 30 states. On June 14 a UNICEF report said that 1,342 people had died from the disease out of 23,304 cases detected.

New Mongolian PM elected: Mongolia's parliament elected the Great Hural, elected M. Enkhbajpalsan yesterday as Prime Minister of the North Asian country. Reuters reports from Mongolia.

Enkhbajpalsan, 41, won a commanding majority with 49 votes for his candidacy with 24 votes cast against him in the Great Hural. Enkhbajpalsan is leader of the Democratic Union coalition which dealt a stunning defeat to the former Communist Mongolian Revolutionary People's Party (MPP) in parliamentary elections held last month.

2 Filipinos die in chopper crash: A pilot and his lone passenger died yesterday after the Philippine Air Force helicopter they were flying crashed in the mountainous northern Philippine province of Benguet, rescue officials said, AFP reports from Manila.

They Huey helicopter was flying from an air base in the northern province of La Union and was on its way to a military camp in the province of Nueva Ecija north of Manila when it encountered bad weather, the Manila rescue coordinating centre of the air transport office said.

Israeli FM to meet Arafat: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Thursday that his Foreign Minister David Levy would meet Palestinian President Yasser Arafat next week, AFP reports from Cairo.

"Foreign Minister Levy will meet with Arafat next week," Netanyahu said at a joint press conference with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Suu Kyi joins martyr's day ceremony: Burmese leader and Aung San Suu Kyi attended a Martyr's Day ceremony in Yangon, laying a wreath at the tomb of her father, independence hero Aung San, who was assassinated 49 years ago, AFP reports from Yangon.

Aung San Suu Kyi arrived for the ceremony at Martyr's Mausoleum at the base of Yangon's renowned Shwedagon Pagoda in a limousine provided by the government, accompanied by seven young girls. The opposition leader left the mausoleum just minutes after laying a wreath to her father.

Death toll in flood in China 716: The number of people killed in devastating floods across eight provinces of south and central China has reached 716, the Ministry of Civil Affairs said yesterday, Reuters reports from Beijing.

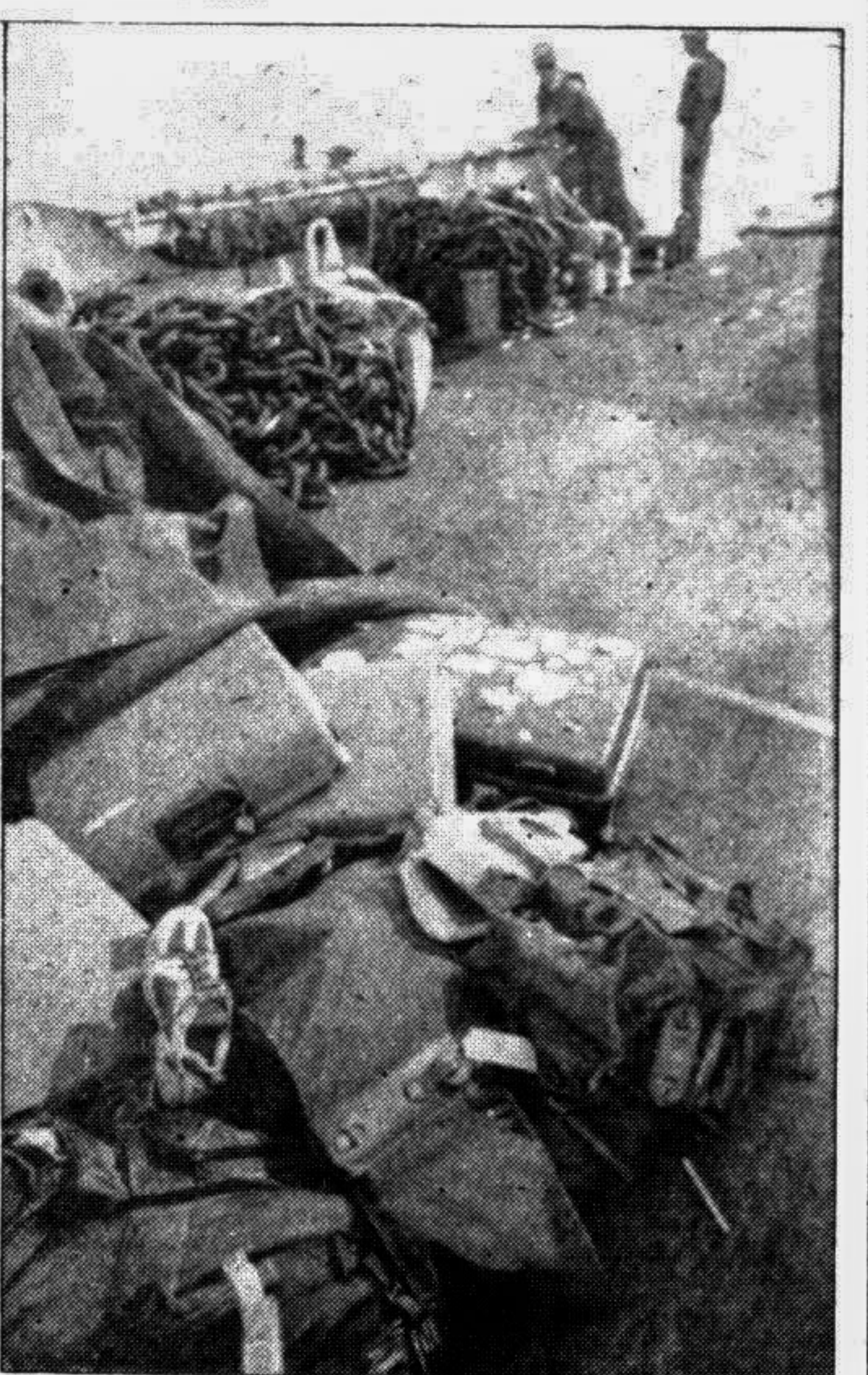
Nearly four million people have been cut off by flood waters, two million have been forced to leave their homes, 810,000 homes have collapsed and 2.8 million homes have been damaged, the ministry said in a statement.

Blasts kill 10 in Algiers: At least 10 people were killed in two bomb attacks, one a car bomb, in the town of Blida, south of the Algerian capital which has been hit by a series of bombings since May, the Daily El Watan said yesterday, AFP reports from Algiers.

Neither of the blasts, which occurred Wednesday, had been reported by officials as of yesterday. Blida is 35 kilometers (21 miles) outside Algiers. At least 10 people were killed in one of the blasts, which hit a busy cafe in downtown Blida Wednesday evening, the paper said.

Yeltsin invites Suharto to Moscow: Boris Yeltsin has invited Indonesian President Suharto to visit Moscow, the Russian President's office said Thursday, AP reports from Moscow.

Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov will deliver Yeltsin's letter and invitation to Suharto during his visit to Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, beginning Friday, a statement from Yeltsin's office said.



Baggage and sneakers sit on the deck of the US Coast Guard Cutter Juniper as it searches the Atlantic Ocean at the crash site of a TWA Flight 800 on Thursday. All 228 people aboard were reportedly killed after an explosion on the plane bound for Paris. — AFP/UNB photo

Karadzic removes himself from power: Holbrooke

BELGRADE, July 19: Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic has signed a statement removing himself from public life. His political career came to an end last night.

Holbrooke was speaking to CNN from the Serbian capital Belgrade where he held marathon talks with Milosevic Thursday on removing Karadzic from power.

The statement was signed in Belgrade late Thursday and witnessed by Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, Holbrooke said.

"As of today Dr Biljana Plavsic has assumed the office of temporary acting president of Republika Srpska until completion of elections on September 14, therefore as of today Dr Karadzic has relinquished the office of president of RS," Holbrooke said.

It's the end of Karadzic's political career," Holbrooke said in a live interview with the US television station.

The US envoy said Karadzic

had "signed a statement removing himself from public life. His political career came to an end last night."

Holbrooke was speaking to CNN from the Serbian capital Belgrade where he held marathon talks with Milosevic Thursday on removing Karadzic from power.

Under the agreement Karadzic will not appear on television, radio or in public. Neither will he take part in Bosnia's elections due to be held later this year, Holbrooke said.

As well as relinquishing his post, "immediately and permanently" as president of the Serb part of Bosnia, he stepped down as head of the ruling Serb Nationalist Party.

Earlier report says, US envoy Richard Holbrooke today announced he had sealed an agreement removing from

power hardline Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, an indicted war crimes suspect.

Holbrooke said the agreement had been thrashed out during lengthy talks here with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and senior Serb leaders.

The official final version of the text, signed by Karadzic, Milosevic and a raft of senior Bosnian Serb leaders, is as follows:

1) As of July 19, 1996, Dr Biljana Plavsic has assumed the office of temporary acting president of Republika Srpska until completion of the elections of September 14, 1996, scheduled in accordance with the Dayton peace agreement, when a new president will be elected.

2) Dr Radovan Karadzic states that he shall withdraw immediately and permanently



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (R) confers with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who pay a visit to Cairo on Thursday for talks, bearing new proposals on Palestinians to prove his seriousness in seeking peace. — AFP/UNB photo

ASEAN FMs prepare to take credit for regional peace

JAKARTA, July 19: Foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations gathering for their annual meeting are preparing to take credit for peace and stability in the region, reports AP.

No surprises are expected from the two-day meeting starting Saturday. It will be followed next week by separate but related sessions of the ASEAN Regional Forum, a fledgling security organisation, and talks between the seven ASEAN members and their so-called dialogue partners, which include the world's top economic and military powers.

India and Myanmar are to be inducted as members of the forum Myanmar will also become an observer at ASEAN's

deliberations, the step before gaining full membership.

The United States and several European countries are disappointed by ASEAN's willingness to welcome the Yangon regime before it improves its record on human rights and democracy.

Russia, China and India will be formally promoted to full dialogue status with ASEAN, which consists of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

On hand for the dialogues will be US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

Primakov also will deliver an invitation from Boris Yeltsin

for Indonesian President Suharto to visit Moscow. Suharto, in his first major public appearance since rushing to Germany for a medical examination, opens the ASEAN meeting Saturday.

In their joint communiqué, the foreign ministers say "the relative peace and stability in the region could be largely attributed to the endeavors of ASEAN to cultivate the habits of dialogue, consensus and co-operation."

However, they acknowledged that tensions existed and expressed concern over the situation in the South China Sea, a reference to overlapping claims to some or all of the Spratly Islands by Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam and China.

'Arabic newspaper received warning before TWA jet blast'

WASHINGTON, July 19: A major Arabic newspaper received a warning on Wednesday of an attack on an American target from the same group that claimed responsibility for the terrorist bombing in Saudi Arabia that killed five Americans in November.

The written warning "was apparently not passed along to authorities," the network said. "In Arabic, it warned there would be a strike at an American target and then in chilling specifics, said: 'All will be surprised by the size of the attack, the place and the time,' adding: 'The time will be tomorrow morning and tomorrow morning is soon.' When TWA Flight 800 exploded on Wednesday night, 'because of the time differences, it was already tomorrow morning in the Middle East,' ABC said. There was no immediate

comment from the State Department.

AFP adds from Moriches, New York: Rescue crews searching for survivors of a TWA jumbo jet that exploded and crashed into the Atlantic with 228 people aboard, are keeping a lookout for a container of blood infected with the AIDS virus the US Coast Guard said.

The white container is filled with eight liters (two gallons) of blood infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which causes AIDS the Coast Guard said.

They did not specify why the container was aboard the TWA Boeing 747 that exploded in a fireball and plunged into the ocean shortly after taking off from New York's Kennedy International Airport late Wednesday.

'Iraq continues to block UN inspectors'

UNITED NATIONS, July 19: Disputing Iraqi claims, the chief UN weapons inspector said Iraq continued Thursday to defy UN orders to allow inspectors inside a suspected arms site near Baghdad airport, reports AP.

On Tuesday, Iraqi guards blocked inspectors from the site, claiming the route passed through a "presidential area" forbidden to foreigners. The Security Council said Iraq's action violated a June 22 agreement allowing inspectors "immediate, unconditional and unrestricted" access to all sites believed to conceal weapons banned under UN resolutions.

Following a meeting with council President Alain Juppé, Iraqi Ambassador Nizar Hamdoun said the dispute had been resolved. Hamdoun said the team was escorted to the site Thursday afternoon but broke off its inspection after sundown.

US announces fresh peace mission to ME

WASHINGTON, July 19: US envoy Dennis Ross on Thursday announced a fresh peace mission to the Middle East, saying that new Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may be more amenable to working with Arabs than some thought, reports Reuters.

Speaking at a state department forum for newspaper editors, he said he would leave for the region this Sunday to determine what steps might next be taken to the peace process.

He will visit Israel, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and also have talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and expects to be back in Washington in a week US officials said.

Our focus is going to be in those places where we think we can make headway, based on discussions with all sides, Ross said adding, "we don't want to close the door to any approach that can work."

Cong (I) urged to give 25 seats to Muslims in UP

NEW DELHI, July 19: Former minister and Congressman Aslam Sher Khan, yesterday urged his party leadership to give at least 25 seats to Muslims in the coming assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, so that it sent a clear signal to that community that Congress wanted to give them their rightful place in the political life of the country, reports PTI.

In a letter to the party president, Narasimha Rao, Sher Khan said this was the right time for the Congress to take a step forward by announcing that tickets for 25 seats out of the 125 allotted to the Congress as per that agreement with the Bahujan Samaj Party should be given to Muslims who were truly representative of that community.

He stressed the decision of giving out tickets should not be left to the UPC but to the AICC.

'Diana to continue to play vital role in public life'

LONDON, July 19: British Prime Minister John Major said on Thursday that Princess Diana would continue to play an important role in public life despite her divorce from Prince Charles and the loss of her royal title, reports Reuters.

He told independent television station ITN it was wrong to suggest Diana would disappear from view after she announced she was resigning as patron of more than 100 charities to concentrate on her personal life.

She is a member of the royal family and she will remain a member. So she is going to have an important role in our public life as far ahead as we can see, he said.

Diana, 35, resigned from the charities after she and heir to the throne Charles were granted a preliminary divorce petition to end 15 years of increasingly bitter marriage.

'Iraq continues to block UN inspectors'

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Election in Kashmir in September

NEW DELHI, July 19: India's autonomous election commission announced today that legislative elections will be held in September in the strife-torn state of Kashmir, which has been under federal rule since 1990, reports AFP.

"It has been decided that the polls would be spread over four days in September," Chief Election Commissioner T N Seshan told reporters, here. "The exact dates will be discussed further."

Parliamentary elections were held in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, in May after a seven-year gap amid charges of widespread coercion by the Indian security forces.

Another AFP report says, a nine-year-old boy was killed and three injured today when a powerful mine exploded in Srinagar, the summer capital of the troubled Indian state of Kashmir, the United News of India (UNI) said.

Witnesses said the explosion at 10:20 am (0450 GMT)

in Srinagar's Gaw Kadal area shattered windows of homes and offices, including those of the UNI Bureau.

Nine-year-old Omar Rashid, who was playing in the area, died instantly.

Three others have been admitted to hospital in critical condition, police said. Witnesses said the blast occurred shortly after a military vehicle passed through the area.

Meanwhile, a fierce gun battle was continuing between Indian security forces and Muslim militants in a quarter ringed by Srinagar's famous Dal Lake — a major tourist attraction — after troops launched a search there to flush out rebels.

Officials sources said the early today search was sparked by a tip-off that several guerrillas were hiding in the Konda Mohalla district, which has been cordoned off.

The violence came amid a crippling general strike called by the powerful all parties freedom conference.

Pakistan keeps options open on signing CTBT

ISLAMABAD, July 19: Pakistan is keeping its options open on signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) for which negotiations are to restart in Geneva on July 29, officials here said Thursday, reports AFP.

"A decision to sign or not to sign the CTBT would be made at the appropriate time," a Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman told a press briefing here.

Pakistan would make a decision "taking fully into account its security concerns, official text of the treaty and the positions of nuclear weapons states and other nuclear capable states," the spokesman said.

He denied as "misleading" a local newspaper report that Pakistan might sign the CTBT "unilaterally," irrespective of the position of India, which has said it would not sign unless the accord addressed its security concerns.

Asked to explain Pakistani concerns, the spokesman said the CTBT should not leave any "loopholes" stressing that all nuclear-capable countries "must come on board."

The spokesman said Pakistan would reply "quite soon" to a letter from US President Bill Clinton to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto seeking Islamabad's "cooperation" in the CTBT negotiations.

US ambassador to India, Frank Wisner, discussed the CTBT issue with Pakistani leaders during a visit here earlier this week.

During a speech to top Pakistani military officers, he called on both Pakistan and India "to join the great majority of nations in the world, travelling down the road to the end of the nuclear age."

Off the Record

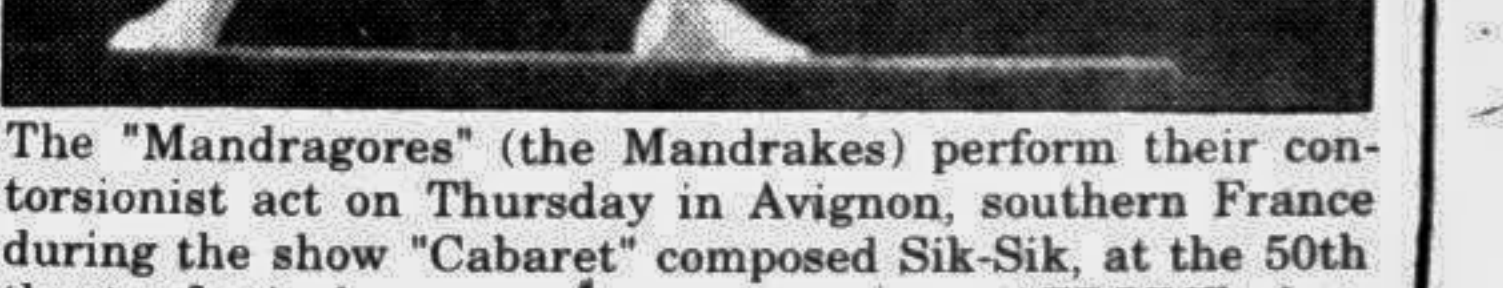
Bid to prevent unhealthy cultural phenomena

BEIJING: No more rich wives or emperors. Not even professional killers. Those words and phrases are among the latest that Chinese commercial censors have eliminated in a campaign to rid companies, advertisements and product labels of what the Xinhua News Agency called "unhealthy cultural phenomena," reports AP.

Specifically targeted are names and slogans that sound colonial, feudal or just plain offensive, the state-run news agency reported Wednesday.

Officials in central Hunan province have ordered name changes in 749 firms, including ones that used "Emperor" and "Rich Wife," Xinhua reported.

And federal regulators have turned down about 50 applications for commercial labels that included names like "Professional Killer" and "Mafia."



The "Mandrages" (the Mandrakes) perform their contortionist act on Thursday in Avignon, southern France during the show "Cabaret" composed Sik-Sik, at the 50th theatre festival. — AFP/UNB photo

Rao's political future hanging in balance

NEW DELHI, July 19: Former Indian prime minister P V Narasimha Rao's political future hung in the balance today as he awaited a High Court ruling on whether he has to testify in a notorious "cheating" case, reports Reuters.

Lawyers said the Delhi High Court would hear Rao's appeal against a summons to testify as a co-accused in the case today after two days of sifting through lower court files.

If his appeal succeeds, the wily 74-year-old's hand in a battle to stay on as president of the demoralised and squabbling Congress Party will be strengthened.

But the Times of India daily quoted a source close to Rao as saying that if his appeal fails the party will call a meeting of its elite Congress Working Committee (CWC) to elect either a "working president" or a new president.

Rao — then a government taints that the leadership issue is not open.

The party, which ruled India for all but four years since independence from Britain in 1947, was tossed out of power in general elections in April and May.

However, it remains a force to be reckoned with. It is still the second largest party in parliament and its support is crucial to the survival of the centre-left, 13-party coalition government of Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda.

The "cheating" case involves an expatriate Indian who says he paid 100,000 dollars to a Rao acquaintance in the early 1980s in an attempt, which ultimately failed, to win a state contract.

The former prime minister has been caught up in the case because the expatriate Indian, Lakhubhai Pathak, says that

Officially, the party maintains that the leadership issue is not open.

Rao, who managed to snuff out post-election opposition from party rebels, faced fresh calls to quit last week when the lower court asked him to testify on July 24 in the case.

But the question of his continued leadership went off the boil this week after the Delhi High Court dismissed an appeal from a group of independent lawyers for his arrest.

The group, the All India Lawyers' Forum for Civil Liberties, as vowed to keep up the pressure on Rao by taking its case to the Supreme Court, the nation's highest tribunal.

Strife within the party reached new heights this week when Rao allies scuffled with dissidents at an informal meeting of the CWC. On Wednesday, they accused the half-dozen

dissidents in the 19-member CWC of aiding other, political parties.

One of the leading Rao opponents within the party, Rajesh Pilot, denied on Thursday that he wanted to see a split within Congress or that he wanted to join the United Front government.

"I am a Congressman. How can I think of joining a non-Congress government?" he told reporters. "We shall not let anything happen which will weaken the party."

The "cheating" case has added to a mood of introspection and desperation in the party and follows a string of scandals which were seen as contributing to its drubbing in the elections.

Rao has also been in the public eye in connection with a fertiliser import scandal in which one of his sons has been probed by federal investigators.

Chechen commander claims Dudayev alive

SOMEWHERE IN CHECHNYA, Russia, July 19: Chechen guerrilla commander Salman Raduyev, reported to have been killed in March, resurfaced to stun Moscow with a claim that former rebel leader Dzhokhar Dudayev was also alive and should revenge, reports Reuters.

"I swear to Allah that Dzhokhar Dudayev is alive," Raduyev told a news conference at a secret location in Chechnya on Thursday, "I swear to Allah," he repeated.

His assertion could not be independently confirmed, but nor was Dudayev's reported death in a Russian rocket attack on April 20.

Raduyev, who defined the Russian army after a hostage taking raid in the southern region of Dagestan in January, said Dudayev was in a "safe place" but in grave condition. Raduyev, whose identity was

confirmed by journalists who knew him well as scarcely recognisable except for his voice. He said his face had been altered by plastic surgery in Germany after being destroyed by a Russian sniper's bullet.

He said Dudayev, replaced as rebel leader after his reported death, by Zelimkha Yandarbiyev, had ordered an all-out war against Russia to avenge the attempt on his life.

"I got an order from him which I will carry out at any price. Russia will yet pay for this attack," he said.

Other Chechen rebels and relatives reported at the time that Dudayev had been killed and his death was widely accepted in Moscow. But his burial at an undisclosed location was shrouded in secrecy and many Chechens refused to believe he had died.

condition was so bad that it might be worse than that of general Anatoly Romanov, Russia's former top commander in Chechnya who is in a deep coma in hospital after his car was blown up in the regional capital Grozny in October.

Raduyev's "lone wolf" group of rebels took hundreds of hostages in the southern Russian town of Kizlyar in January and then, after a siege of over a week, escaped with some of the hostages from the nearby village of Pervomayskoye.

His reappearance posed a new threat for Moscow whether or not Dudayev is alive since he challenged Yandarbiyev's authority and raised the prospect of rival uncontrolled rebel groups striking out wildly at Russia.

He accused Yandarbiyev of treason for agreeing a ceasefire with President Boris Yeltsin in May and insisted that he must denounce the deal.

Raduyev said he was ready to launch a war without rules against Russia that could include chemical warfare.

He said he had acquired stinger surface to air missiles — the US-made weapon that helped Afghan Mujahideen oust Soviet forces in the 1980s — and would shortly use them against Russian warplanes bombing Chechnya.

"I can state with 100 per cent certainty that Dzhokhar Dudayev is not alive," Sergei Stepashin, secretary of Russia's commission on Chechnya, told a news conference.

Dudayev was reported killed in a Russian rocket attack on April 20, but journalists have seen neither his body nor his grave.