

ASEAN FMs' meet welcomes Yangon ASEAN urged not to grant Myanmar observer status

PARIS, July 20: Myanmar's pro-democracy leader is urging that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) reconsider granting Myanmar observer status when it meets over the weekend, a newspaper reported Friday, reports AP.

"Such constructive engagement will only reinforce the regime in place without improving the situation," Aung San Suu Kyi told the French daily Le Monde.

The ASEAN nations — Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam — say dealing with the generals rather than ostracising them will coax them to improve human rights.

Suu Kyi, reiterating her call for economic pressure, fingered the French oil the regime.

Investors shouldn't come, because all the money goes to an elite," she said. The com-

pany total, with a gas pipeline project in southern Myanmar has become "the strongest source of support for the Burmese military system."

The best business opportunities always go to the same elite," she said. "There's a class here that is becoming very rich, to the point of not knowing what to do with its money."

Reuter adds from Jakarta: ASEAN today welcomed Myanmar as an observer at the annual foreign ministers' meeting of the seven-nation Southeast Asian grouping.

The association of Southeast Asian Nations has rejected Western calls for sanctions over the confrontation between Myanmar's military rulers and pro-democracy activists.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas told Burmese Foreign Minister OHN Gyaaw at the 15-minute ceremony he wanted "to extend a most cordial welcome" to Myanmar.

US team inspects Dhahran blast site

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia, July 20: A US team inspected a military complex Friday where 19 American servicemen died in a bombing last month, hoping to find ways to prevent future terrorist attacks, reports AP.

The 40-member team led by retired Army Gen Wayne Downing also will seek Saudi cooperation to improve security around US military bases.

The FBI is looking for clues to determine who carried out the June 25 bombing. Wide suspicion has fallen on Muslim militants opposed to the presence of Western forces in Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's holiest cities.

On Tuesday, an Islamic militant group based in Saudi Arabia threatened to hit an American target. The warning, faxed to an Arab newspaper in London, came a day before a TWA jetliner exploded shortly after taking off from New York, killing 230 people.

The Movement for Islamic Change did not specify its intended target, and so far there has been no link established with the TWA explosion. The cause of the crash is under investigation.

Mamata challenges state govt to arrest her

CALCUTTA, July 20: Congress MP Mamata Banerjee, who has been indicted by the Yusuf Commission in its report on mob violence during a by-election in 1992 today challenged the state government to arrest her, reports PTI.

Taking a belligerent stand on the commission's findings which also evoked strong reactions from her party MLAs in the state assembly yesterday, the Youth Congress leader threw a challenge to the state government to take action on the basis of the biased report.

If they have the guts, let them arrest me. I don't have any faith in the state government, let alone the Yusuf Panel report, Banerjee told a gathering near the writers Building (the state secretariat) in the busy BBD Bag area.

Prince Andrew to leave Royal Navy in '99

LONDON, July 20: Newly divorced and now seeking a career change, Prince Andrew is to leave the Royal Navy in 1999, officials announced Friday, reports AP.

Queen Elizabeth II's second son, whose exploits as a navy pilot included flying helicopters as a decoy for Argentine missiles in the 1982 Falkland Islands war, will take a desk job in London as a final posting.

The Duke of York has decided not to make the Royal Navy his long-term career, the defence Ministry said in a statement.

A short spell in military service is traditional for the sons of British monarchs. But 36-year-old Andrew was, until Friday's announcement making the navy his career.

Buckingham Palace said it was too early to say what Andrew will do after he leaves the navy.

US, Turkey to go on with operations to protect Kurds

ANKARA, July 20: Turkey's Islamist-led government and the United States have agreed to continue a military operation to protect Kurds in northern Iraq from attacks by Iraqi government forces the US ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright said Friday, reports AP.

"Our two governments have reached a meeting of the minds for continuing operation provide comfort," Albright told a news conference after holding talks with Turkish officials including the new Islamist Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan.

Erbakan had criticised the US led, Turkish based force before he came to power in late June however, since then he has signalled softening of his policy of the issue.

Albright expressed hope that the Turkish parliament, which has the final say on the future of the force would extend its mandate in a vote due late this month.

800 soldiers killed, claim Tigers

COLOMBO, July 20: Tamil Tiger guerrillas said today they had slaughtered up to 800 Sri Lankan soldiers after overrunning a military garrison in the island's northeast, reports AP.

The clandestine Voice of Tigers radio said nearly 800 troops could have perished in Thursday's massive pre-dawn assault on the army camp in the coastal town of Mullaitivu and the subsequent fighting.

AP adds: Commandos sent to rescue hundreds of soldiers trapped by Tamil rebels battled to within a few hundred metres (yards) of the military base on Saturday, the third day of what the guerrillas are calling their biggest offensive of the 13-year war.

A few kilometres (miles) from the coastal Mullaitivu base, naval gunboats found the bodies of seven sailors killed when a rebel suicide squad rammed a speedboat packed with explosives into a naval gunboat late Friday, military officials said.

A rebel statement said they killed more than 400 soldiers and lost 120 of their fighters in the siege they named Operation Unceasing Waves.

It has been the most intense fighting since the Tamil Tiger rebels lost their stronghold, Jaffna City, to the Sri Lankan Army in December, and one of the largest battles in the Tamil campaign for independence.

It was not known how many of the base's 1,200 soldiers, sailors and policemen were still alive. Rebels breached the base's perimeter within the first few hours of fighting on Thursday, and soldiers scattered into two groups inside the 8-square-kilometre (3-square-mile) camp to fend them off.

The latest rebel attack came five days before the 13th anniversary of countrywide anti-Tamil riots in which more than 2,000 people were killed. That incident is generally regarded as the start of the Tamil war for an independent

homeland in the predominantly Sinhalese island. More than 42,000 people have been killed since 1983.

In Colombo, military spokesman Brigadier Sarath Muvasinghe dismissed the rebel claim of hundreds of soldiers dead.

"It is absurd, only for their propaganda purposes," he said. But he declined to give his own estimate of casualties, saying that the soldiers were not in a position to ascertain numbers while the battle raged.

Military helicopters braved heavy guerrilla machine gun fire to evacuate about 100 injured commandos and bring in fresh troops. Three helicopters were damaged by rebel fire on Thursday and Friday while trying to land commandos.

Mortar shells were raining down on us as we went forward," Private Samantha Kumara said from his hospital bed in central Anuradhapura city. The resistance was so heavy that one helicopter had

to leave before wounded could be put aboard.

Fourteen rebels and another sailor were killed on Thursday when planes and naval gunboats destroyed eight guerrilla boats and guerrillas damaged a warship.

The 40 metre (120-feet) ship Ranaviru was firing its heavy guns at rebel positions on the beach, trying to clear an area for a second force of troops to land to save the base, when it was sunk.

Other gunboats were still hunting for survivors and bodies. The exact number of crew members was not immediately known, since the ship was carrying additional sailors, apart from its usual 38-member crew.

Sailors on other warships saw rebel boats picking up several sailors, bodies and taking some survivors prisoner before rescuers reached the spot, the officials said.

It was not known how many rebels were in the boat, which slipped through the Chinese-

built ship's defenses.

On shore, the rebels pinned down about 250 members of Sri Lanka's elite special forces commando unit who landed by helicopters on Thursday evening to try to reinforce the base, and killed their commander, officials said.

Lt. Col. Fazli Laif apparently died to his death after he was shot, said other officials, who also spoke on condition of anonymity.

Among the wounded was Brigadier Lawrence Fernando, the commander of Mullaitivu camp, who was away in Colombo when the fighting started but went in with the commando force to try to reach his base.

The rebel statement said, "two major contingents of over 1,000 fighters smashed the army's defense lines and entered the inner perimeter from the south and the north."

US sends 1st shipment of equipment to Pakistan

WASHINGTON, July 20: A first shipment of US military equipment, released to Pakistan under a one time waiver of nonproliferation sanctions, is on its way to the South Asian country, US and Pakistani officials said, reports AP.

Twenty six truckloads of equipment left Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by ship on July 11 and should reach Pakistan by late August, Pakistani embassy spokesman Rifaat Husain said.

Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Scott Campbell confirmed that the transfer of 356 million dollars worth of previously embargoed military hardware to Pakistan had begun.

They've got quite a little bit of equipment Campbell said, noting the shipments were to include three reconnaissance

aircraft Harpoon anti-ship missiles, missile launchers Howitzers Rockets, and a variety of spare parts.

Islamabad bought the equipment before October 1990, when suspicion about its nuclear weapons programme prompted then President George Bush to impose non-proliferation sanctions that barred its delivery.

Pakistan can now take delivery of the material under a one-time waiver to those sanctions. US officials believe the equipment will have no significant impact on the conventional weapons balance in the region.

The United States is also seeking to reimburse Pakistan for 28 F-16 aircraft it bought, also before 1990 for 658 million dollars but could not receive because of sanctions.

SC orders seizure of huge unaccounted sums from ex-Cong minister's home

NEW DELHI, July 20: India's Supreme Court has ordered the seizure of huge unaccounted sums from a former minister implicated in a housing scandal, calling his role in the affair a national shame, reports AP.

Judges Kuldip Singh and NK Singh on Friday condemned the acts of former minister of state of urban affairs, PK Thungon, saying his "involvement with touts and gangs to cheat poor government servants was unimaginable."

"The nation should hang its head in shame," they said.

Thungon, former urban development minister Sheila Kaul, and one of Kaul's close aides have been accused of taking bribes to allot subsidised government housing out-of-town.

Twelve people have already been arrested in connection

with the case — a major embarrassment to former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party, which was soundly defeated in the April-May general elections.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India's top intelligence agency, told the Supreme Court that raids on Thungon's homes revealed 371 million dollars that could not be accounted for. The court ordered the CBI to seize his assets.

The judge said the CBI indicated prima facie the involvement of Thungon in this racket.

The CBI report accused Kaul's personal staff of charging between 15,000 to 40,000 rupees (428 to 1,142 dollars) a piece to applicants seeking expedited grants of government housing.

Normally there is a lengthy waiting period for the housing,



Afaq Ahmed (R), chief of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (HAQIQI) addresses a big public meeting in which he demanded a separate province for the Urdu-speaking population of Sindh, in Karachi, Friday. Thousands of MQM followers participated in the procession and chanted slogans in support of the new Southern Sindh province. — AFP/UNB photo

Int'l community for Karadzic's trial on war crimes charges

SARAJEVO, July 20: The international community Friday welcomed news that Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic was stepping down, but it insisted that he must be made to stand trial on war crimes charges, reports AP.

Karadzic, indicted for war crimes by the UN War Crimes Court in The Hague, signed a statement earlier Friday resigning as president of the Bosnian Serb entity and stepping down as leader of the ruling Serb Democratic Party (SDS). US envoy Richard Holbrooke announced.

Speaking to CNN television in Washington, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said: "We think this is a significant step in the right direction."

"We intimidated Karadzic and his supporters" into resigning by threatening to bar the SDS from Bosnian elections and to reimpose economic sanctions on the

Bosnian Serbs and on Serbia, Burns said.

"We turning up the heat on the Bosnian Serbs," he said, adding that Karadzic and his military chief Ratko Mladic "ought to end up in the Hague."

In Sarajevo, Ejup Ganic, vice-president of Bosnia's Muslim-Croat federation, said Karadzic's stepping down was a significant step forward which had created the conditions for the September 14 elections to go ahead.

He said the move had "simplified" the arrest of Karadzic, who has been indicted for war crimes in Bosnia. "Now war criminals cannot hide behind any political function," he said.

Ganic warned, however, that Karadzic would continue to act behind the scenes until he was arrested.

In Brussels, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, who has 50,000-plus troops in Bosnia under the NATO-led

Peace Implementation Force (IFOR), said Karadzic's resignation was significant, but added: "Justice remains to be done."

"The proper place for Radovan Karadzic is in the international criminal tribunal in The Hague to stand trial for the war crimes for which he has been indicted," he said.

Norway paid homage to the achievement of Holbrooke, whom the Norwegian press has said is a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize to be awarded in Oslo in October.

AP adds from Pale, Bosnian Serbs in Radovan Karadzic's stronghold are pledging to protect their leader if anyone tries to deliver him to the international war crimes tribunal.

"If anyone tried to take Radovan to the Hague, he would be killed. I would take up a weapon and kill him," said Radovic, a Sarajevo native. "If you club one Serb on the head, it's like hitting the whole nation."



A masked rioter faces an armoured police vehicle running down a barricade in Istanbul's Gazi district Friday where police and mainly leftist members of the Alevis Muslim sect have been involved in violent clashes for two days now. Alevis demonstrators blocked off the district with barricades in support of hundreds of hunger striking left-wing inmates in prisons throughout Turkey. — AFP/UNB photo

Levy to meet Arafat on Tuesday:

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy will meet Tuesday with Yasser Arafat, the President of the Palestinian authority, Israeli television said Friday, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday in Cairo a Levy-Arafat meeting would take place next week, without giving further details. The aim of this meeting will be to create a negotiation framework to advance the peace process," Levy told Israeli television Thursday.

Clash leaves 1 dead in Turkey:

One demonstrator was killed Friday when police clashed with leftists protesting in support of political inmates on a hunger strike, the Anatolia news agency reported, AP reports from Istanbul.

The demonstrator died during an exchange of gunfire with police in a poor neighbourhood, the report said.

A policeman also was slightly wounded Friday as police broke up a similar street protest by leftists who set up barricades in a suburban neighbourhood.

6 Egyptian thieves shot dead:

Egyptian police in the southern province of Assiut shot dead six men who were trying to steal cattle yesterday, security sources said, Reuter reports from Assiut.

They said the men were trying to make their getaway with the cattle in Nazali Gharoub village near Al-Qusiya town, about 300 km (190 miles) south of Cairo, when they came up against a police convoy which opened fire at them. There were no police casualties.

Volcano erupts in NZ again:

The Mount Ruapehu volcano belched back to life again early Saturday, spewing out a column of ash and lava bombs around its base, AP reports from Wellington.

Activity at the central North Island volcano started shortly after midnight Friday night and tapered off slightly by daybreak, officials said. The eruptions were described as moderate and not as violent as last week's activity. Ash had been falling as far as 25 kilometres (15 miles) to the north and south of the mountain that first erupted again in mid-June.

Food poisoning breaks out in Japan:

The number of people struck by Japan's worst post-war outbreak of food poisoning climbed past 6,000 Saturday, with 13 in critical condition, officials said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

An additional 144 victims had fallen ill this morning in Sakai, in the suburbs of the western city of Osaka, bringing the toll since the end of last week to 6,083, a city official said. Nearly all of the victims were elementary school children aged between six and 12, but there were also some infants, teachers and junior high school students, he said.

Strong quake rocks Greece:

A strong earthquake measuring 6 on the open-ended Richter scale was recorded early Saturday in the southeast of the Aegean Sea, Athens Observatory's Geodynamics Institute reported, AFP reports from Athens.

No victims or damage were immediately reported from the quake, which struck at 000 GMT. It was felt particularly in the Dodecanese Archipelago.

Yeltsin to visit India in '97:

The Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, will visit India early next year, according to the Russian Ambassador in India, Albert Chernyshev, PTI reports from Calcutta.

"The visit has been agreed upon in principle and the agenda are being worked out from the Russian side, Chernyshev said here Friday but declined to give details. This would be Yeltsin's maiden visit to India.



Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto (R) checks out Japanese Samurai swords presented by his teacher and master Taizaburo Nakamura Friday at the Premier's official residence. — AFP/UNB photo

FBI searching for evidence on terrorists' hands in TWA jet blast

NEW YORK, July 20: From the bottom of the continental shelf to the highest levels of Washington, Americans searched Friday for evidence that the nation's second-deadliest aviation disaster was also its deadliest terrorist attack, reports AP.

The FBI stopped short of declaring the crash of TWA Flight 800, a crime, although the bureau announced a "massive" investigation to find out what caused the huge explosion that brought down the 747.

"We have a lot of things that look like accident, a lot of things that look like terrorism," said James Kallstrom, head of the FBI's New York office.

Assuming the disaster may have been deliberate, agents have been contacting informants in the terrorist underworld, according to a federal investigator who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of

anonymity. "It would be foolish not to be out there seeking every bit of information we can, from any corner," the source said.

Unidentified sources quoted Friday by ABC News said a federal agency received a claim of responsibility for the TWA explosion from a group tied to Ramzi Yousef. He is now on federal trial in New York City, accused of plotting to blow up 11 West Coast-bound airliners in a single day in 1995.

The group said the explosion was in retaliation for Yousef's capture, ABC said. Yousef, 29, who says he is innocent and is representing himself at the trial, is also accused of bombing a Philippines Airlines flight in December 1994, killing a Japanese passenger. Authorities also believe Yousef was the mastermind of the World Trade Centre bombing in February 1993.

Kallstrom told reporters

that the FBI would not take control of the TWA investigation from the National Transportation Safety Board until more evidence is found. He urged people to call a toll-free number with tips, and gave the Internet address for the FBI home page.

Kallstrom said the bureau was pursuing many theories. One was the possibility that a surface-to-air missile — perhaps fired from a boat — brought the plane down. Radar detected a blip merging with the jet shortly before the explosion, something that could indicate a missile hit.

But Pentagon officials, speaking Friday on condition of anonymity, said that given the planes altitude and the range of hand-held missiles, the theory is highly unlikely. Also, they said government analysts have studied several radar reports of the area and found the blip to be false.

The head of the Federal

Aviation Administration said the government has been strengthening security at American airports since last summer and is prepared to upgrade it further if needed. "The FAA's security program will be modified as needed to ensure the safety of the traveling public," David Hinson said Friday.

Rain, wind and fog hampered efforts to recover the wreckage that Kallstrom said might contain vital clues to what destroyed the plane Wednesday night and killed all 230 people aboard.

NTSB Vice Chairman Robert Francis said divers did not go into the water Friday. Seas were so choppy that some search vessel crew members were getting sick. "It's tough stuff out there," he said.

Sonar detected a 15-foot (4.1-metre) spike on the ocean floor — possibly part of the plane, Francis said. But the search had to be suspended for

fear the sonar equipment, which trail on cables behind the ship, would be lost in the storm.

There was no sign Friday of the plane's black boxes, which record pilots' conversations and the plane's operations.

At Kennedy Airport, relatives gathered at a hotel for the heartbreaking process of identifying their loved ones and collecting their remains. Some walked from the elevator to the lobby in groups of three or four, holding each other.

They seemed unconcerned for the moment with the question that occupied the rest of the nation.

Whether it was an act of terrorism or mechanical failure, doesn't make any difference," said Joe Lynchner, who lost his wife and two daughters. "What's important is to put a face to the tragedy. It wasn't just a plane crash. There were people in there, good people."

Rabbi Alvin Poplack, an airport chaplain, has previously worked with relatives of crash victims.

"The families' reactions are very wide-ranging. They go from distraught to numbness," he said. "Sometimes they look like they're fine, and a word or image can set them off again."

Suffolk County Medical Examiner Charles Weill said that most of the victims suffered fatal injuries in the air and that while some may have been conscious when they hit the water, drowning was an unlikely cause of death.

"It looks like a great many of them died upon impact with the water," he said. "That is not to say that serious injury or death did not occur in the sky itself."

Most suffered blunt injuries like those in a super high-speed car crash," he said. One or two appeared to have inhaled water, but that was probably a reflex action, he said.