

BRIEFLY

French FM won't visit Orient House: French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette will avoid Orient House, the PLO's unofficial headquarters in annexed east Jerusalem, during a visit to the city yesterday, a Palestinian minister said Monday. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Higher Education Minister Hanan Ashrawi said de Charette would instead meet a Palestinian delegation at France's consulate in the city. Palestinian leaders earlier said they hoped the French minister would visit Orient House in defiance of Israel, which had put intense pressure on Paris to prevent the visit.

Blasts kill 3 in Georgia: At least three people were killed in a series of bomb blasts in the Ochamchira area of Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia region over the past few days. ITAR Tass said Monday in a report monitored by the BBC. AFP reports from London.

One of the blasts destroyed a bridge near the village of Pokhesh, killing three guards, the agency said, quoting what it called reliable sources. In the town of Ochamchira itself a bomb went off in a building which houses police departments, the local public prosecutor's office and the security service, the agency said.

Strong quake rocks Indonesia: A strong earthquake with a magnitude of 6.6 on the Richter Scale jolted Indonesia's central Sulawesi province Monday night, damaging buildings, a Meteorology official in Jakarta said yesterday. AFP reports from Jakarta.

There were no immediate reports of injuries. Meteorology official Budi said the quake hit at 9:10:59 pm (14:19 GMT) Monday, with the epicentre 62 kms southwest of Toli-Toli in central Sulawesi province, at a depth of 30 kms beneath the ocean floor. Strong tremors were also felt in the province's capital of Palu, about 160 kms from the epicentre, Budi said, although there were no reports of damage there.

Ex-US Congressman jailed: Former US Rep. Dan Rostenkowski has entered a prison hospital to begin serving his 17-month sentence for mail fraud, AP reports from Rochester.

He will remain at the Federal Medical Center while his health is evaluated as he recuperates from prostate cancer surgery. Rostenkowski's lawyer, Howard Pearl, denied reports that the 68-year old Chicago Democrat had a couple of going away parties over the weekend.

US envoy meets Hussein, Qaboos: US envoy Denis Ross held talks in London on Monday with the rulers of Jordan and Oman at the start of a trip to try to breathe new life into the Middle East peace process, the State Department said. Reuter reports from Washington.

Ross was due to fly to Syria yesterday to meet President Hafez al Assad. He would then visit Israel and Jordan before returning to Washington at the end of the week. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said. Burns quoted Ross as saying he had held "excellent, productive" talks with Jordan's King Hussein and Oman's Sultan Qaboos said but gave no details. He was also due to meet Prince Bakder bin Sultan, the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to Washington who is currently in London.

Turkish troops kill 22 Kurds: Turkish troops killed 22 Kurdish rebels during fighting in the southeast Sunday, the regional governor's office based said, AP reports from Diyarbakir Turkey.

Clashes took place in the provinces of Hakkari, Batman, Sirt and Sinak. There was no report of troop casualties.

2 killed as WWII plane crashes in UK: Two people died when their World War II plane crashed during an air display Sunday, police said, AP reports from Manchester.

The bodies of the pilot and navigator of the 50-year old Mosquito bomber were found in the cockpit after the plane crashed into woodland near Manchester's Barton Airfield, said a police spokesman. Hundreds of spectators at the annual Barton Air show watched in horror as the plane went down a mile (1.6 kms) west of the airfield.

Landslide claims 3 in Japan: Three people were killed in a landslide on the Japanese island of Shikoku on Monday a police spokesman said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

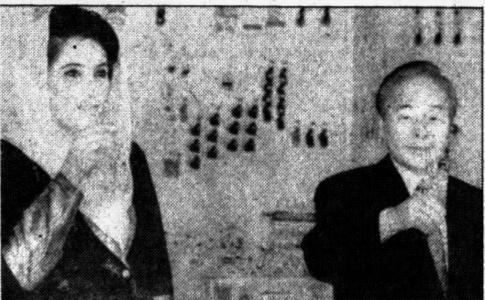
The spokesman, from the prefectural police headquarters in Kochi, said two men, aged 36 and 65, and a woman, aged 63, were engaged in reinforcing the side of a mountain in Nakamura in southern Shikoku when the accident occurred. A strong typhoon passed over the area at the end of last week, prompting warnings of landslides by Japan's Meteorological Agency.

Chemical seized in Mexico: Mexican police have seized 2.75 metric tons of ephedrine, a precursor chemical used in making illegal narcotics, the attorney general's office said on Monday, Reuter reports from Mexico City.

The chemical was found at a Mexico City railway station hidden in containers holding components for air ventilators, the office said in a statement. It said the chemical had arrived from Hong Kong by sea before being shipped from the Pacific port of Manzanillo to Mexico City.

Tamil journalist Manian dies: Noted Tamil journalist and editor of Tamil magazines 'Idayam Pesugirathu' and 'Gnanabhoomi', S Venkatasubramanian, popularly called as Manian, died of cardiac arrest at a private nursing home here late last night. PTI reports from Madras.

He was 64. He is survived by his wife. He has no children. Manian, whose travels have taken him to several foreign countries, has written many travelogues. A close friend of former Tamil Nadu chief minister, the late MG Ramachandran, Manian was the only Indian representative of the International Travel Writers Association, a post equivalent to being a member of the Unesco.



Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto toasts with South Korean President Kim Young-Sam during a dinner hosted by South Korean President at Blue House on Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

Bomb scare grips Riyadh again

DUBAI, July 23: Saudi security forces on Monday sealed off a road in the capital Riyadh and removed suspicious parcels after a bomb scare near the spot where five Americans and two Indians were killed by a bomb last year, residents said, reports Reuter.

There has been no official word on what was in the parcels involved in the latest security scare in the Kingdom where 24 Americans and two Indians have been killed in bomb attacks in the past year. In Washington, the State Department said all US government employees based in Saudi Arabia, as well as their families, who wished to return home for security reasons could do so at government expense.

But it said it had confidence in Saudi Arabia's stability. Some Americans living in Riyadh said they had not been aware of the statement, which has also issued on a US Embassy emergency telephone line in Riyadh.

Offensive against Chechens continues

GROZNY, July 23: Russian forces pressed ahead Tuesday with a ground offensive against a rebel stronghold in the mountains, but bad weather kept combat aircraft on the ground, reports AP.

The Russian commander for the North Caucasus region arrived in the Chechen capital, Grozny, for a possible meeting with rebel leaders, the Interfax news agency reported. According to the Russian military command in Grozny, rebel forces have been pushed back into the rocky hills near the town of Shatoi, in southern Chechnya, Interfax said.

It said Russian forces were pounding rebel positions with artillery and tank fire, but the effectiveness of the offensive was limited by low clouds, mist and drizzle, which kept combat aircraft grounded for a second day.

The military command's press center said five Chechen separatists were killed in fighting near Shatoi on Monday, and three cross country vehicles and a mortar were destroyed.

Russian forces say 250 to 300 separatist fighters are defending positions in the mountains southwest of Shatoi.

Myanmar junta bans newsmen for unfavourable reports

JAKARTA, July 23: Myanmar foreign minister confirmed Monday that his military government keeps records on foreign journalists and denies them visas if their reports reflect badly on the regime, reports AP.

Myanmar military rulers are highly critical of news coverage of its human rights record and treatment of dissidents. Reporters are sometimes without explanation denied permission to visit, and some temper their stories to be allowed back in the country.

Asked at a news conference whether Myanmar had a list of banned reporters and how many names were on it, Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw said, "I can't say offhand, but the idea is, it's simple human relations."

Taiwan assembly erupts in violence again

TAIPEI, July 23: Opposition and ruling Nationalist Party deputies in the National Assembly kicked, punched and scratched each other during a confirmation hearing for a top government official on Monday, reports AP.

Two opposition deputies were sent to the hospital with minor injuries following the melee that erupted after Nationalist deputies attacked Lai Ching-teh of the main opposition Democratic Progressive Party.

Lai had accused Hsu Shui-teh, the government's nominee to head the Examination Yuan overseeing the bureaucracy, of renegeing on a commitment to end vote buying by Nationalist Party candidates.

Nationalist deputies charged the podium after Lai quoted a Chinese proverb saying Hsu had grown fat as a result of "breaking too many promises."

Male deputies threw punches and kicks, and tore each other's clothing as they grappled in the aisles.

Myanmar junta violating basic human rights: Christopher

JAKARTA, July 23: The military regime in Myanmar is violating basic human rights and the deterioration of the rule of law there increases the threat from its drug trade, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Tuesday, reports AP.

Christopher's assessment of conditions in Myanmar was made in remarks prepared for the ASEAN Regional Forum, consultative body concerned with political and security issues under the auspices of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

In a move opposed by the United States, ASEAN granted Myanmar observer status on Saturday and has promised full membership to Yangon's repressive junta, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC.

ASEAN insists that its "constructive engagement" with Myanmar military leaders

will encourage it to relax its repression of pro-democracy activists, led by 1991 Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas says that while ASEAN acknowledged that resolution of Myanmar's problems was needed, it could not be achieved by isolating the country.

"The SLORC's refusal to heed the desire of a majority of the Burmese people for a transition to democratic rule and its increased harassment of the democratic opposition not only violates basic, universal human rights but raises the chances of instability, bloodshed and migration within Myanmar and across its borders," Christopher said.

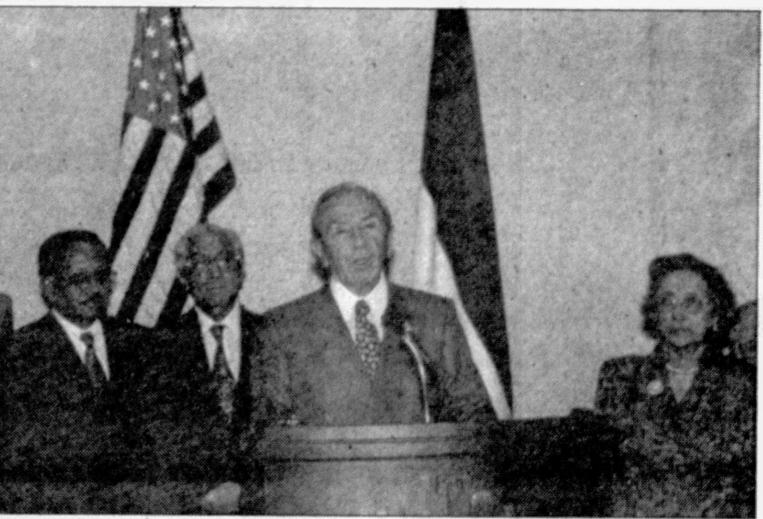
The United States and several European nations contend that ASEAN's embrace helps entrench SLORC, which seized

power after Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy scored a landslide victory in 1990. SLORC refused to accept the outcome and nullified the vote.

"The steady deterioration of the rule of law has increased the threat that Myanmar's burgeoning drug trade poses to citizens from Bangkok to Berlin and from Shanghai to San Francisco," he added.

Christopher told the forum that their individual approaches to Myanmar may differ but all sought a meaningful political dialogue that leads to greater stability and openness.

"It is important that we use our engagement with Myanmar to promote concrete results, especially after these meetings in Jakarta. Myanmar's participation in the ARF and its closer relationship with ASEAN make it especially important that the process of reconciliation move forward, not backward."



US Secretary of State Warren Christopher (C) speaks to the press on Tuesday with the National Human Rights Commission vice chairman, Miriam Budiardjo (R) and the human rights official, Clementino dos Reis Amaral (L), 2nd left is unidentified before they begin their meeting at the Hilton hotel in Jakarta. The commission was set up by President Suharto to monitor human rights in Indonesia. — AFP/UNB photo

Lanka masses troops to retake Mullaitivu base

COLOMBO, July 23: The Sri Lankan army on Tuesday massed new troops on a northern beach to prepare for an assault on a military base where Tamil rebels claim to have wiped out the entire 1,200-man garrison, reports AP.

Three helicopters shuttled troops to the beach Monday, while naval landing craft set off from the nearby port of Triancomealee with more infantrymen to be landed a few kilometres (miles) south of the Mullaitivu army base, military officials said.

The government belittled the importance of the battle, which is turning out to be the military's biggest debacle in the 13-year civil war and has reaffirmed the Tamil Tiger guerrillas as a military force.

"This attack is to restore their international image after recent defeats. But this is not a

big victory for them," Anuruddha Ratwatte, Deputy Defence Minister, told reporters.

But military officials said it appeared that the base had been overrun, since there was no radio contact with the garrison since Friday. A handful of soldiers could be hiding in the nearby jungles, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The rebels have started destroying military structures at the 8-square-kilometre (3.2 square miles) base, which was once the township of Mullaitivu, 275 kilometres (170 miles) north of the capital, Colombo.

Meanwhile, seven people, including five soldiers, a paramilitary guard and a civilian were killed as violence continued in northeastern Sri Lanka, the defense ministry said Tuesday.

Source of Amazon river discovered

LIMA, July 23: An international group of scientists claimed on Monday to have discovered the source of Amazon river, which carries a fifth of the entire world's flowing water, in a remote Andean mountain creek, reports Reuter.

They said the first waters of the Amazon emerged from an underground glacier at the Apacheta Crevice, 16,958 feet above sea level in the southern Peruvian Andes.

The source of the Amazon had not been unquestionably identified before, and there were many contradictory opinions, said a statement by the group, which carried out a nine-day expedition to the area earlier this month.

Their claim ran counter to previous accounts of the river's source, including that established in 1971.

Expedition by the National Geographic Society, which located the Amazon's source.

US to work for ousting Karadzic from Pale HQs

NEW YORK, July 23: Having pressured Radovan Karadzic into giving up his political powers, the United States will now work to force the Bosnian Serb leader from his headquarters in Pale, US envoy Richard Holbrooke says, reports AP.

The next step in the process is that Karadzic should leave Pale, the mountain stronghold which he really created, said Holbrooke, architect of last year's Bosnian peace accords, in a TV interview aired Monday by the Public Broadcasting Service.

"As long as he's in Pale, even if he's invisible, even if he's out of public and political life, I personally feel uncomfortable, and so do my colleagues."

Karadzic, indicted for war crimes by the UN tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands, agreed Friday to resign as leader of the Bosnian Serb main political party and withdraw from all public political

activities. He remains in Pale, a mountain village near Sarajevo which served as his headquarters during the 3 and half Bosnian war.

The agreement followed marathon talks between Holbrooke and Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade, in which the US envoy threatened to reimpose sanctions against Serbia if Karadzic did not step down.

John Kornblum, US assistant secretary of state for European Affairs, would travel to Belgrade this weekend to force Karadzic to leave Pale, Holbrooke said.

In New York, Bosnia's UN Ambassador, Muhamed Sacitovic said the Muslim-led government in Sarajevo would continue to press for new UN sanctions against Serbia until Karadzic and Bosnian Serb military chief Gen. Ratko Mladic were both brought before the war crimes tribunal.

'Traces of chemical residues from explosives detected on wingtip of TWA jet'

WASHINGTON, July 23: Traces of chemical residues from explosives have been detected on a wingtip of TWA Flight 800, CNN television reported Monday citing sources close to the investigation, reports AP.

The traces were found in an area near what would be the Boeing 747's baggage compartment using a device that can detect even slight traces of such chemicals CNN said.

But the network stressed the development was not considered yet to be conclusive and would not be until subsequent testing had verified it.

An FBI spokesman in New York said he was unaware of the report and the Coast Guard said it had "no knowledge" of the development.

Meanwhile, ABC television reported that what it called a "body of evidence that is hard to ignore" had been building in support of the theory that a projectile of some kind was fired at the TWA jumbo jet.

The FBI for the first time was saying the missile theory was on its short list of causes along with a bomb blast or less likely mechanical mishap, ABC said.

The FBI now has more than 100 accounts from witnesses who said they spotted a distinct light in the sky heading toward the plane before it burst into flames; one eyewitness told ABC it looked like a flare moving toward the jet.

Saying such a projectile would have been fired from a boat, ABC said the FBI was compiling a list of all merchant ships that were in the area at the time of the disaster, and a list of all power boats stolen or missing at the time.

Earlier Reuter adds: Searchers pulled six bodies and the largest piece of fuselage found so far from the Atlantic Ocean on Monday as the hunt for victims and wreckage of TWA Flight 800 intensified, officials said.

Off the Record

Rumours or romance

JOHANNESBURG: President Nelson Mandela's recent official visit to France has revived speculation in South Africa about his love life, reports AP.

The Sunday Times reported that while in Paris, Mandela met at least three times with Grace Machel, a United Nations official and widow of a former Mozambican president with whom he has been romantically linked.

Their meetings included a private lunch in Mandela's suite at the state guest house, and dinner with a small group of friends at the residence of Barbara Masekela, South Africa's ambassador to France, the Johannesburg newspaper said. It added that Machel flew to South Africa with the president on his official jet when his four-day visit to France ended last Thursday.

"They are very good friends and it is in that context that they appeared together. She was in Europe and it was possible for them to meet, so they met," presidential aide Jakes Gerwel told the Times.

A story of a bus journey

VICTORIA, British Columbia: Monique Villebrun's regular ride on Garry Shrive's bus was their ticket to romance, reports AP.

Bus driver Shrive wed passenger Villebrun on Saturday, on the bus that became their love connection.

The couple hit it off in September 1994, after Villebrun started boarding Shrive's bus every other Saturday on her way to work.

Often the pair found themselves alone during the early morning run to Tillicum Mall, where Villebrun works at a card store.

Shrive was so attracted he rearranged his schedule so he could drive her to work every day. He asked her out and romance bloomed.

When Villebrun proposed, it just seemed natural the pair get married on the bus.

So Saturday evening, a bus decorated with pink pom-poms picked up the groom and 45 guests from a hotel and took them to Hatley Castle in suburban Colwood, where they exchanged their vows.

The bride arrived in a taxi. The bus's electronic route sign flashed "Congratulations Garry and Monique" as it pulled up and Villebrun descended the castle steps to board the bus.

Sex guide home page on internet!

LOS ANGELES: Men looking for prostitutes no longer have to cruise the streets or thumb through the "escorts" section of the telephone book, reports AP.

Net-surfing sex patrons now need look no further than the World Sex Guide home page on the Internet, a clearinghouse of information about sex for sale, from the best intersections to find hookers in any given town in any given country to prostitution etiquette.

Various common sexual fetishes are covered, in detail. And sections on local prostitution laws and how to spot undercover vice officers try to help readers avoid arrest.

The guide on the World Wide Web has information for many countries and almost every US state.

The California page, for instance, gives an excerpt from the state penal code on prostitution; users can then click to "specific information about the cities and regions."

Under "Street Whores in San Fernando Valley Section of L.A.," for example, the guide provides street locations, racial composition of the prostitutes and prices ("reasonable — 20 dollars and up").

Israel to go ahead with easing of closing of WB

JERUSALEM, July 23: Israel said on Monday it would go ahead with a promised easing of its five-month-old closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, reports Reuter.

Major General Uzi Dayan decided to implement the easing of the closure starting tonight at three am (2400 gm) the army said in a statement.

Israel said last week it would allow an additional 10,000 Palestinians to enter the Jewish state to work but delayed implementation of the measure after Palestinian security forces abducted an Israeli Arab over the weekend.

Prospects for peace remote even after 13 yrs of Lankan ethnic war

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka, July 23: Hopes soared months ago when it seemed civil war might finally come to an end. But now, Sri Lankans are marking the war's 13th anniversary with news of hundreds more dead, as one of the conflict's largest battles rages in the remote north, reports AP.

On Tuesday, Sri Lanka marks the anniversary of anti-Tamil riots that are regarded as the start of the war. More than 42,000 people have died in the fighting. Recent government promises to redress Tamils' grievances, but peace overtures have time and again been dashed by ingrained distrust.

"We stand where we stood 13 years ago ... More destruc-

tion, more people killed, but we have not moved very far on finding a solution to the ethnic problem," said Dharmalingam Siddhathan, leader of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamils, a small political party.

The Tamil Tiger rebels claim to have overrun the base at Mullaitivu on the northeast coast last week and wiped out its 1,200 men. Army reinforcements sent to relieve the garrison have been pinned down for five days.

The government says the garrison is holding out, and puts its losses at about 300.

The battle clearly indicates that a political solution remains distant, and that rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran is willing to intensify the war if

there are attempts to exclude him from the political process.

"They are still a considerable fighting force," said Harry Goonatilake, a retired air force chief. "These aren't hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, but conventional warfare involving thousands on both sides."

Tamil anger simmered against the majority Sinhalese after the British granted Sri Lanka independence in 1948. Tamils — who had been favoured by the British — were excluded from many government jobs. Education was unavailable in the Tamil language. Land distribution was weighted against them.

On July 23, 1983, Sinhalese mobs, enraged by the death of 13 Sinhalese soldiers in an ambush, went on an

anti-Tamil rampage, turning the country into a carnage of blazing shops, homes and vehicles. At least 2,000 Tamil men, women and children were killed.

Tamil rebels groups declared all-out war, concluding that only an independent Tamil state could protect their people.

In December, the military drove the rebels out of their longtime stronghold of Jaffna City, a defeat which the government hoped would compel them to talk peace. By May, the rebels had fled from the entire Jaffna Peninsula, which they had governed as their own kingdom for five years.

This past May, the rebels fled the peninsula that they had governed as their own

kingdom for five years, but they struck back with a vengeance this week at Mullaitivu.

The expulsion raised hopes that the expensive war was coming to an end. Defence costs, running at 1 billion dollars a year, now are likely to rise.

But this week's fighting could further deflect the government from its plans to rebuild the war-raged peninsula, which it sees as the key to winning the trust of the northern Tamils. It wants to finance the reconstruction with foreign aid of 274 million dollars.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga's peace plan also has run into problems, as the main opposition party signalled its objections by an-



An unidentified injured person with blood stained clothes makes a telephone call to inform his condition to the relatives after the bomb blast at Lahore International Airport on Monday. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion in which nine people were killed and thirty injured. — AFP/UNB Photo

'Ray at work' inaugurated in Calcutta

CALCUTTA, July 23: A photographic exhibition on Satyajit Ray, "Ray at work," was inaugurated by the West Bengal minister in charge for home (police) and information and culture, Biddhadev Bhattacharjee, here yesterday, reports PTI.

The photographs, taken by Hiran Sen, capture the film Mastro at work. The 46 photographs, exhibited at the Calcutta Information Centre, show Ray in his study, during shooting, during the search for location, and during music and sound recording.

It will remain open till July 29.