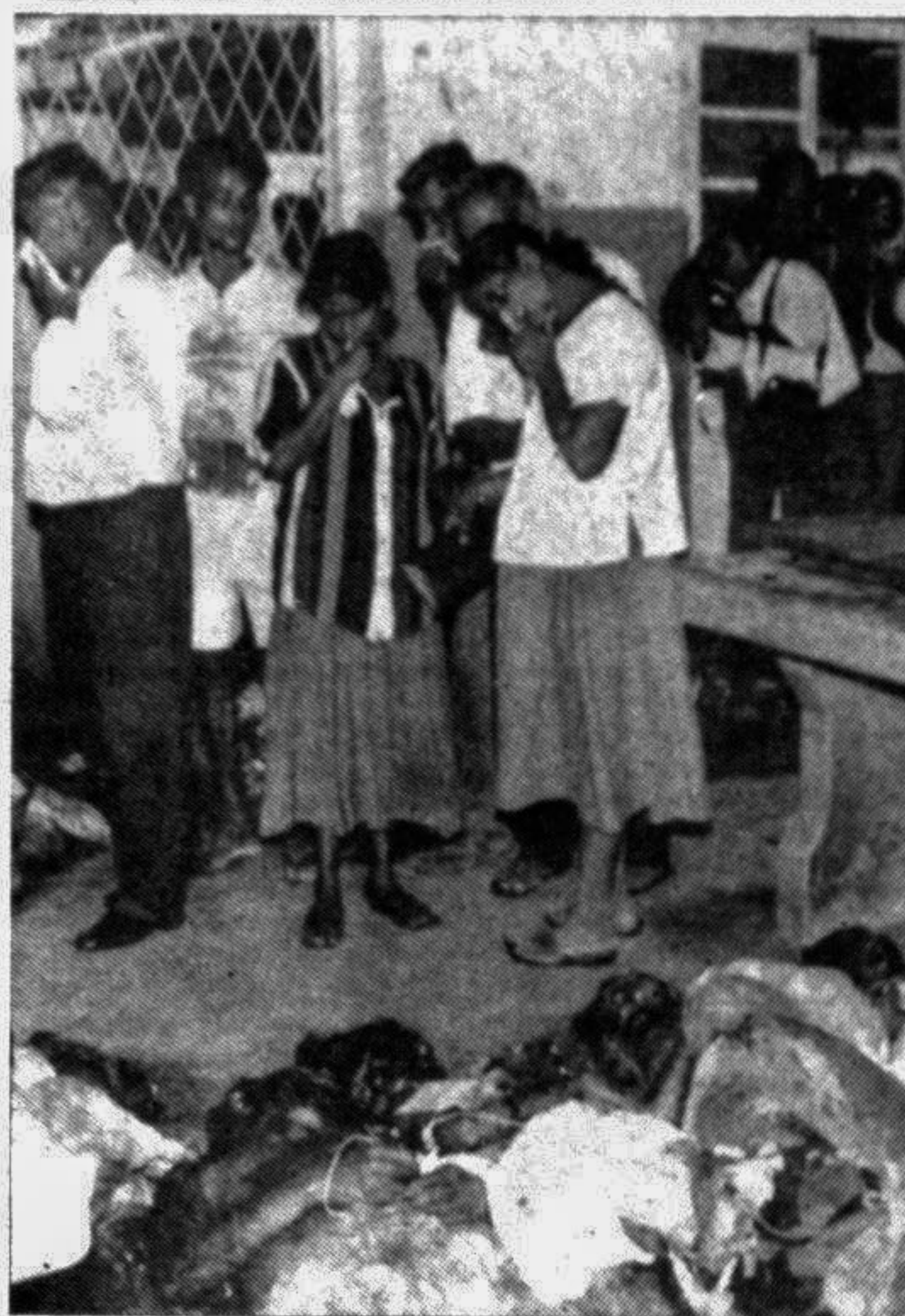


BRIEFLY



Men and women look for their missing relatives among the bodies lined up at a hospital here Friday, a day after suspected Tamil Tiger guerillas bombed a commuter train just outside the Sri Lanka capital Colombo leaving some 70 people killed and nearly 600 wounded. — AFP/UNB photo

Mosque set on fire in Bosnia: A mosque was set on fire Thursday in the Croat-controlled town of Prozor in central Bosnia. Bosnian state television reported, AFP reports from Sarajevo.

Unidentified assailants broke into the mosque, poured gasoline and set it ablaze early in the morning, the television said. It added that the inside of the mosque was destroyed. Prozor, now Croat-controlled, had a 37 per cent Muslim population before the war it was the place where the Muslim Croat war, which lasted throughout 1993, began in October 1992.

Israeli couple killed: An Israeli husband and wife were killed and their son badly wounded in an attack overnight Thursday near Beit Shemesh south of Jerusalem, military sources said, AFP reports from Israel.

Automatic weapons were used in the incident which took place along a road between Beit Shemesh and Kfar Zakarya, an Israeli community not far from the West Bank, the sources said.

Clash leaves 10 killed in Mexico:

A clash between Mexico's army and members of the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) left a total of 10 combatants dead, the newspaper Reforma reported Thursday.

Although the Ministry of Defence told AFP in Mexico that no such battle took place late Wednesday, a source with the Guerrero state government who requested anonymity assured the press that it did. The source said the confrontation began at 0001 GMT Thursday between a group of soldiers and a group of EPR with five killed on each side.

Typhoon kills 20 in Philippines:

Typhoon Gloria continued to pummel much of the Philippines' main island Friday, killing at least 20 people and leaving six others missing, disaster relief officials said, AP reports from Manila.

Its expected departure for Taiwan was slowed by a high pressure area in the Pacific which caused the sixth tropical storm to strike the Philippines this year to continue dumping monsoon rains and whipping many areas with up to 170 kilometre per hour (106 mph) winds. The National Disaster Coordinating Council said more than 36,000 people were affected by the storm, many of them forced to temporarily flee their flooded villages and live in government shelters.

Storm death toll rises 31 in Vietnam:

The confirmed death toll from tropical storm Frankie reached 31 on Friday with more than 200 people injured and crews of more than two dozen fishing boats still missing, AP reports from Hanoi.

The worst storm of the year destroyed the thatch homes of tens of thousands of coastal residents and flooded more than 100,000 hectares (247,000 acres) of rice fields, the officials Vietnam News said. The storm battered northern Vietnam's Red River delta from late Tuesday through Wednesday, dumping 110 millimeters (4.3 inches) to 200 millimeters (8 inches) of rain on Hanoi, the port city of Haiphong and five provinces.

11 missing as ship sinks in Java Sea:

Only one person has been rescued from a ship that sank in the Java Sea last week, and the 11 other crew members are still missing, a news report said Thursday, AP reports from Jakarta.

The survivor, Wahyudi, 18, told the Daily Media Indonesian that he floated for four days after the ship, Garuda Jaya, was ruptured by big waves Saturday night. He was rescued by fishermen.

Diamonds worth \$2m stolen in France:

Thieves escaped with 10 million francs (2 million) worth of diamonds in a cheeky heist on the French Riviera police said on Thursday, Reuters reports from Cannes.

They walked into the hotel room of a gems dealer — resident in Brussels and with dual Bolivian and Belgian nationality — and unscrewed a safe from the wall. The incident apparently took place on Wednesday near the elegant croquette boardwalk. Police said they had no clues.

AI condemns Spain: Amnesty International

(AI) condemned Spain Thursday for slipping tranquilisers into the drinking water of 103 deportees to make it easier to expel them from Spain to Africa. AP reports from Madrid, Spain.

Investigators move closer to declare TWA Flight crash a terrorist act

EAST MORICHES, New York, July 26: After reviewing black-box tapes containing a "fraction-of-a-second sound" — then silence — investigators moved closer Thursday to declaring that terrorism brought down TWA Flight 800, a source said, reports AP.

"It was considered a 20 per cent possibility that the explosion was caused by mechanical failure, now it's down to a 5 or 10 per cent possibility," a source said on condition of anonymity. "Investigators are holding out for physical evidence before they declare the probe criminal."

The source spoke late in the first day of study of the tapes from the flight data and cockpit voice recorders, which divers brought up from wreckage on the ocean floor late Wednesday.

Federal investigators said they had detected a "fraction-of-a-second sound," then silence, 11-12 minutes after takeoff. They could not immediately explain the sound

aboard the Paris-bound 747 that exploded over the Atlantic shortly after takeoff from New York on July 17. All 230 people aboard died.

James Kallstrom, the FBI agent in charge, said investigators were comparing the data to that from so-called black boxes in crashed caused by bombs, such as the explosion of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland.

Vincent Cannistrano, who headed the CIA investigation into the Lockerbie bombing, told The Associated Press Thursday night that, he got chills as he heard federal officials describe the TWA tape.

"It reminded me so vividly of Pan Am 103, said Cannistrano, former CIA chief of counter terrorism operations.

On the Lockerbie tape, there was also a normal conversation and then a crunching sound like the airplane breaking up. That was the

bomb. A massive catastrophic event that cuts off everything at once is probably a bomb, not a mechanical problem," he said.

Earlier in the day, Kallstrom said, "We know there was a catastrophic explosion; it was caused by some kind of a bomb, obviously. We're not further describing how that would be, whether it was carried on, whether something hit the plane from outside and caused it to explode."

But Kallstrom added that they were still considering other possibilities such as a mechanical problem that has nothing to do with terrorism or criminality, or something in the cargo that would have caused a mechanical problem.

Robert Francis, vice chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, refused to speculate about what the sound was, or what it meant. He said both tapes would be subjected to detailed tests.

The data recorder's tape

was contaminated by water, but Francis said its information could probably be recovered. Meanwhile, President Bill Clinton — who consoled victims' families earlier in the day — announced security measures that could make air travel more expensive and less convenient.

The president ordered that more baggage be screened or hand-searched and that aircraft making international flights be fully inspected — every plane, every cabin, every cargo hold, every time.

He appointed Vice President Al Gore to head a commission on airline safety that will report back in 45 days on how to deploy the latest security technology.

The Federal Aviation Administration immediately told passengers to be read for delays at airports because of "conditions at security screening checkpoints" as more bags are opened and searched.

US still recognises Ntibantunganya as president

First objective is to bring peace, says Burundi's military ruler

BUJUMBURA, July 26: Burundi's capital appeared calm and composed overnight Thursday after a bloodless coup put a former military ruler in power and triggered outrage in Washington and at UN headquarters, reports AP.

Pierre Buyoya, 46, a Tutsi officer who was declared interim president by the Defence Ministry, immediately sought to install calm, saying his top priority was to bring peace to a country driven by ethnic bloodletting.

"Our first objective is to quickly stop the massacres and all forms of criminality that prevail in Burundi," Buyoya said on national radio. "Our first objective is to bring peace."

He promised protection for everyone in Burundi — Tutsi or Hutu — and vowed to defeat those whom he said had "embraced the ideology of genocide."

"We urge the international community to understand us," he said. Today's change... is a change based on the greater resolve of refusing let our country, Burundi, go to waste while wise men sit back and watch.

Though the streets of Bujumbura looked calm, the new regime closed all border crossing and airports in this small Central African republic of 5.5 million people, which has teetered on the brink of civil war for three years.

The United States, directly caught up in Burundi's woes after the ousted president Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, fearing for his life, took refuge in its embassy in Bujumbura on Tuesday, condemn the coup.

US envoy Howard Wolpe was set to travel to east Africa at the weekend to discuss plans for an African regional

force that would help Burundi avert the ethnic nightmare that left 500,000 dead in Rwanda in 1994.

Reuters adds: The United States said on Thursday it still recognised Sylvestre Ntibantunganya as the legitimate president of Burundi and declared it was to early to accept that a military coup had taken place.

It called on all parties to respect the constitution.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns told reporters the situation in the Central African country is clearly chaotic, complex and... evolving hour by hour. But he said at this time Washington still recognised Ntibantunganya as president. Ntibantunganya has taken refuge at the US ambassador's residence in Bujumbura.



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat (L) is welcomed by Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara on his arrival at Damascus Lattakia airport Thursday. — AFP photo

Arafat holds 'positive' talks with Assad on ME peace

DAMASCUS, July 26: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat held "important, useful and positive" talks with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad on forging a common stand for peace talks with Israel's new headline government, reports Reuters.

Arafat was visiting Syria for the first time since he returned to the Gaza Strip in 1994 under an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal condemned by Damascus.

In a statement to reporters after the Thursday meeting, Arafat said: "We listened to the valuable advice of President Assad after we briefed him on the situation which we are facing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the attempts (by Israel) to delay implementa-

tion of what was agreed upon."

Hanan Ashrawi, responsible for higher education in the Palestinian Authority, said Arafat briefed Assad on his talks with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, who became the first member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to see Arafat on Tuesday.

She said Levy asked Arafat to convey an offer to meet the Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara at any time and in any place to discuss how to revive peace talks between Syria and Israel.

She did not reveal the Syrian response to Levy's offer but Syria has in the past repeatedly rejected Israeli calls to upgrade the talks to ministerial level or above.

Speaking to Reuters by telephone from Lattakia after the five-hour meeting, Ashrawi called the meeting "cordial, fruitful, good and positive".

She said Arafat and Assad agreed to call for an urgent meeting of the Jerusalem Committee to discuss Israel's decision to allow Jews to visit the Muslim-controlled temple mount in Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

Israel's High Court as ruled the Jewish faithful should be allowed to visit the mount but not pray there.

Presidential spokesman Joubran Kourieh said Syrian Vice-President Abdel-Halim Khaddam and Foreign Minister Shara were present at the meeting at the presidential palace in Lattakia.

2,000 Tamils being questioned over bombing of train

COLOMBO, July 26: Sri Lankan security forces have detained some 2,000 Tamils in the northern town of Vavuniya for questioning over the bombing of a train in Colombo in which at least 78 people were killed, police said on Friday, reports Reuters.

They said Tamils arriving in the government-held frontier town from the south, including Colombo, were being questioned as part of the search for suspects in Wednesday's blasts, when two bombs wrecked a commuter train.

Another report says, Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali on Thursday condemned the bombing of a train in Sri Lanka on Wednesday that killed at least 78 people.

Landslide kills 19 ROK soldiers

SEOUL, July 26: Nineteen soldiers were killed Friday in a rain-triggered landslide that buried two barracks in which 47 soldiers were sleeping, the Defence Ministry said, reports AP.

Twenty-eight soldiers were rescued within an hour after the pre-down landslide near Chorwon, a city close to the eastern border with North Korea, the Defence Ministry officials said.

Four soldiers were killed instantly in the landslide. All 15 soldiers buried in the mangled barracks were later found dead, the officials said.

Nine soldiers were hospitalised with injuries, five in serious condition, they said.

Rescue work was hampered because of the floods caused by torrential rains, the officials said. Weathermen said that 17.8 centimetres (7 inches) of rain fell in the region early Friday.

Defence Minister Lee Yang-ho instructed the military to prevent similar accidents during the monsoon season, the ministry said.

Israel seals off West Bank

JERUSALEM, July 26: Israel sealed off the West Bank today following the killing of two Israelis in a drive-by shooting in Israel, the army said, reports Reuters.

Israel radio said the Arab gunmen had apparently fled to the West Bank, 16 km (10 miles) east of where the shooting took place inside Israel during the night.

Meanwhile Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed Middle East peace moves with French President Jacques Chirac on Thursday, Netanyahu's office said.

A statement issued by the Prime Minister's office said the two men spoke at length about the peace process and also in relation to the subject of Lebanon and Syria during a telephone conversation initiated by Netanyahu.

They also discussed a visit by Netanyahu to Paris in September and by Jacques Chirac to Israel in October, it said.

US-Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross made his way from Syria to Amman in Jerusalem on Thursday, in the wake of French Foreign Minister Hervé De Charette who took his peace mission on the same route earlier this week.

5 lakh Iranian women die every year during childbirth

TEHRAN, July 26: Some 500,000 Iranian women die each year in childbirth, according to a Health Ministry survey published on Thursday, reports AFP.

A quarter of those who die are aged between 13 and 19, it said.

The study said that 79 per cent of women marry before the age of 20 and the majority have their first child at 19.

Among the poor, between 30 and 50 per cent of women and children suffer from malnutrition, blood problem and iron deficiency, the report said. Iran has a population of around 63 million.

CTBT's success hinges on India's willingness to sign it, warns Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, July 26: Three days before the resumption of talks on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Pakistan warned the treaty's success hinged on India's willingness to sign it, reports AFP.

"We have urged the international community to persuade India to reconsider its position and to join the international consensus on banning all nuclear test explosions, and all other nuclear explosions," a Foreign Office statement here said.

The CTBT negotiations are to resume in Geneva on Monday.

Pakistan has made it "adequately clear that CTBT will have no meaning for South Asia if India is not brought on board," the statement said.

India, Pakistan and Israel are considered so-called "threshold" countries on the brink of acquiring a nuclear arsenal.

Relations between India and Pakistan remain tense. The mutually hostile neighbours have fought three wars since their independence from Britain in 1947, including two over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who met with Indian Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral in Jakarta on Thursday, reportedly failed to win a commitment from India not to block the treaty.

The Pakistani Foreign Office said "the onus for effectively destroying this global initiative would rest on India if it chooses not to sign the CTBT."

It reiterated that Pakistan's decision to sign or not to sign CTBT would be taken at an "appropriate time" after finalisation of the text of the treaty and taking into account the position of other countries, "especially in our region."

Off the Record

Female elephant with rare black tusks

BANGKOK: A female elephant with rare black tusks has been found in Thailand's northern province of Phayao, according to the Thai news agency Thursday, reports Xinhua.

Veterinarians and experts have confirmed that the three inch long tusks of the female elephant are authentically black. It is extremely unusual for a female elephant to develop tusks, they said.

If a female elephant does develop tusks, the tusks should be short and white, they added.

The owner of the elephant said he will follow the tradition to bestow the elephant to King Bhumibol Adulyadej to mark the 50th anniversary of his accession to the throne.

Luxury loving lord sent to jail

LONDON: Family fortune, freedom: Lord Brocket has lost them all, reports AP.

Now the luxury-loving lord, sent to prison this year for a 7 million pounds insurance scam, is losing his country fiddlers. The stately Brocket Hall — an 80-room, 543-acre (220-hectare) estate north of London featuring parkland, a golf course and club house — is up for sale. The property is being offered for £25.5 million.

Prospective owners are bidding not only on a piece of prime real estate, but a chunk of history: It was at Brocket Hall that Lady Caroline Lamb burned the poet Lord Byron in effigy, dramatically marking the end of their love affair.

In the 1980s Lord Brocket, a friend of Prince Charles, turned the house into an elegant conference center that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher used for summits with Ronald Reagan, George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev.

Song on black woman's hair strikes wrong note in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO: A judge has banned a song about a black woman's unwashed hair, after its lyrics struck the wrong note with many in mixed race Brazil, reports AP.

Called "Look at Her Hair," the song says: "Look, look, look at her hair. It looks like steel wool."

"This woman stinks... Smelly animal, she stinks more than a skunk."

Singer Francisco da Silva, who performs in a blond wig and horned hat, insists the song was meant in jest and is about his wife, who like him is part black.

"We don't see any racist connotation in the song," said Luis Andre Calainho, a marketing director for Sony Music's Brazil subsidiary. "If you look at the record, you can see the guy's a clown."

But many in Brazil — where half the 155 million people are mixed race or black — aren't laughing.

"Think of how it feels to be a young black kid and her that blacks stink," said Jorge Damjan, racial coordinator for the Marginal People's Representation center.

A black female legislator condemned the song on the Senate floor Wednesday, and Judge Flavia Viveiros de Castro banned it the same day.

The judge, who banned the song from the airways and record stores, said the song contained "racist and discriminatory expressions in relation to black women." Racism is a crime in Brazil.

Chechens may meet Russians only if OSCE is present

SOUTHERN CHECHNYA, Russia, July 26: An aide to Chechen Chief-of-Staff Aslan Maskhadov said on Thursday the separatist negotiator would meet Russian generals for talks only if his safety was guaranteed by international mediators, reports Reuters.

"They can meet only if the OSCE is present," the aide said, referring to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe whose mission in the Chechen capital Grozny mediates between the separatists and the Russians.

"If we agree to a meeting without them they might tear off his head," said the aide, who asked to be named only as Ilyas.

Behind him was what seemed to be evidence of what he was talking about. The roof of the house at the other end of the courtyard had a yawning

hole in it and one end was burned out.

Maskhadov, like all rebel leaders, is always on the move to avoid attack. The house, home to Ilyas' elderly parents, was one of the places where he regularly took shelter.

"It happened the day before we arrived," said Ilyas, who did not give out his second name for security reasons.

"They did it at five in the morning so they could catch people asleep, but only my mother and father were here and they got up early so were able to take cover."

Russian tanks and artillery stand on the hills around the village, which nestle in the mountains of southeast Chechnya. The soldiers on the nearest checkpoint are in the habit of firing over the top of approaching cars.

Hunger strike claims 2 more inmates in Turkey

ANKARA, July 26: In jail wings controlled by their comrades, inmates on a hunger strike grow weak — and are dying. Outside, sympathisers march in the streets and burn buses, reports AP.

Three more prisoners died Thursday, raising the death toll to six, and hundreds more are said to be edging toward death. Yet Turkey's government, fearing a misstep could cause more strife, refuses either to attempt force-feeding the inmates or to give in to demands for improved conditions.

The roughly 2,000 hunger-striking prisoners — weakening by the day after 67 days of consuming only sugar water, or even just plain water — have gained little sympathy from the majority of Turks because of their perceived ties to terrorism.

Justice Minister Sevket Kazan charged that the strikes at 32 prisons around the country were organised by "terrorist headquarters" inside Bircapraspa prison in Istanbul. He said inmates there were armed with smuggled weapons, and were blocking authorities from tending to the fasting inmates.

Kazan said the government would be "patient." It is inevitable that further unfortunate incidents will occur in case of attempts to take them to hospital by force," Kazan said.

The inmates — and human rights groups — allege widespread torture and other abuses behind bars, especially against suspected terrorists and rebels.

They are demanding better access to legal defence and medical treatment.

Newspaper circulation war escalates in South Korea

SEOUL, July 26: When Lee Bong-kon moved to a new suburb outside Seoul early this year, his first caller was a newspaper salesman with a waterproof bathroom clock as a gift, reports AP.

The next day, an agent from another newspaper visited him, this time offering free copies for at least six months if he promised to subscribe to the paper later.

Lee had become one of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, caught up in an escalating newspaper circulation war in South Korea, in which clients are wooed with gifts and competitors are fought with fists and knives.

Lee rejected both subscription offers. But the newspapers were delivered anyway. So he put up a sign, saying his office already subscribes to them. Even that failed to stop them. "They are crazy," Lee said, pointing to a waist-high pile of

unread newspapers at the doorstep of his apartment. "Imposing something like this is torture."

It is common to give watches, glassware, leather belts and even satellite antennas in exchange for subscribing to a newspaper whose monthly subscription rate is only 100 won.

Some newspapers have hired thugs to threaten and rough up rival distribution agents in some areas, the independent national Hankook Ilbo newspaper has reported.

Most agents are independent contractors not directly employed by the newspapers they distribute. They are provided with promotional gifts by the papers and take a percentage of sales.

South Korean newspapers get 70 per cent to 80 per cent of their revenues from advertisements, whose price is set by the size of their circulation.

The Audit Bureau of Circulation, set up in 1989, has been no help in easing the competition. Its members disagree over how to count their circulation.

The intense competition came to a head last week when a distributing agent of the major national daily JoongAng Ilbo stabbed to death an agent of the rival Chosun Ilbo with a kitchen knife in a city outside Seoul.

The attacker, Lee Dal-yong, 35, told police he was under pressure from his head office to increase circulation and that he was offered a cash reward of 15 dollars for each new subscriber.

"Under a fair trade principle, excessive newspaper competition is wasteful," Prime Minister Lee So-sung said in response to a lawmaker's question at the National Assembly.

Lee said his government

would take regulatory action unless newspapers themselves adopt rules to stop the practice of giving away excessive promotional gifts.

Media rights in South Korea were severely curtailed under past military governments. With more freedom under the civilian rule of President Kim Young-sam, newspapers are expanding both in numbers and in size.

The number of newspapers has risen from 28 in 1987 to 117 this year. The keen competition also has led to an increased number of pages. Major papers now print 48 pages, two to three times as many as they did several years ago.

The circulation war became more intense after the afternoon daily JoongAng, owned by the giant Samsung group, switched to a morning newspaper last year.

The switch touched off cut-

throat competition with several other national dailies that split the morning market, including Chosun, Hankook and Dong-A Ilbo.

JoongAng claims that its competitors also use gifts to woo potential subscribers.

"As far as the distribution war is concerned, no one can blame the other. It's no secret that all use more or less the same promotional strategy," one JoongAng official said, requesting anonymity.

To charge more for their ad space, newspapers tend to inflate their circulations, printing far more copies than they actually sell. Many copies are given away or thrown into dumps.

The liberal national daily Hankyoreh Shinmun estimates that the nation's newspapers throw away about 3 million copies every day, wasting about 120 million a year.