

International

Noted Indonesian labour leader held Police closes off area around PDI HQs

JAKARTA, July 31: Police closed off the area around the opposition Indonesian Democracy Party (PDI) headquarters today after demonstrators began gathering in the area at the weekend, witnesses said, reports AFP.

The demonstrators began gathering at dawn in the central Jakarta seized from supporters of ousted opposition leader Magawati Sukarnoputri Saturday by police and government-backed rebel PDI faction.

Police reinforcements in armoured vehicles soon followed said an AFP reporter at the scene.

The demonstrators sang patriotic songs and chanted anti-government slogans.

We came because we've learned something was going to happen, one of the demonstrators told the news agency.

Security forces did not immediately intervene. Jakarta's military commander Tuesday ordered troops to shoot troublemakers on the spot to curb any further unrest.

Police and a rebel PDI faction seized the headquarters Saturday from supporters of Magawati Sukarnoputri who was sited as head of the party by the government-backed rebel faction.

The seizure led to the worst riots in Jakarta in more than 20 years. At least three people were killed and about 20 injured, while more than 200 were detained by police.

Mochtar Pakpahan the general chairman of the Indonesian Prosperity Workers Union, was arrested overnight in connection with Jakarta's worst riots in more than 20 years at the weekend, the union announced today.

Pakpahan, a figure in Indonesia's independent labour movement, was arrested late Tuesday by six officers from the attorney general's office, the union said in a statement.

62 drown as ferry sinks in India

GUWAHATI, India, July 31: At least 62 people drowned when an overcrowded ferry sank overnight in a rain-swollen river in the remote far eastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, police said today, reports AFP.

At least 20 passengers were missing, a police spokesman told AFP in Guwahati, the capital of the neighbouring state of Assam.

The ferry was carrying more than 80 passengers and two vehicles when it sank late Tuesday in the Nadihing river, the spokesman said.

Indian army divers Wednesday joined a massive search operation in the swirling waters of the Nadihing, police said. They fished 10 more bodies out of the water today to take to 62 the number of known fatalities so far.

It was the worst ferry disaster in six months in India's remote far east, which has experienced severe flooding from the monsoon rains.

Twelve people drowned when a smaller ferry capsized in February in Arunachal Pradesh.

A senior cabinet minister warns Sri Lanka can't spend so much on defence

COLOMBO, July 31: Alarmed at soaring war costs, a senior cabinet minister warned Wednesday that rejection of the government's peace plan would lead to a war to the finish that the country could ill afford, reports AP.

As fighting escalated against separatist Tamil rebels, the government already has exceeded this year's military budget and can expect to spend a great deal more, said Deputy Finance Minister Lakshman Peiris.

There is no way that a country like Sri Lanka can continue spending so much on defence, Peiris told a news conference. The war is not something we can go on with forever.

The government spends one quarter of its budget on fighting the guerrillas, who want an independent Tamil homeland in the north and the east. The 13-year-war has left 43,000 people dead.

So far this year, the war has cost 50 billion rupees (dhs 909 million), or 6.5 per cent of the gross domestic product, he said. The defence budget had been set at 38 billion rupees (dhs 690 million).

The military has launched a series of offensives to drive the guerrillas from their strongholds in northern towns, hoping to force them to negotiate.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga said last week she would be forced to cut subsidies on rice and bread if the war doesn't finish before the end of 1997.

The high defence spending has forced the government to borrow more, leading to increased interest rates, less money for economic activities, lower profits, and ultimately workers being laid off, Peiris said.

Combating terrorism Arab states draw up draft strategy

CAIRO, July 31: Arab countries finished work Tuesday on a strategy to combat terrorism by which they would commit to preventing their territory from becoming a base for terrorists, reports AFP.

Security experts from 15 countries closed a two-day session to draw up a draft strategy to be approved by the 22 interior ministers of the Arab League during their next council meeting in January.

Sudan, accused by Egypt of harbouring Muslim militants waging a violent campaign against the Cairo government, was absent from the meeting although it had expressed its intention to attend.

A spokesman for the Sudanese embassy in Cairo Abdel Aziz Awad, said Egyptian authorities had refused to provide entry visas to the Sudanese delegation, the Arab daily Al-Ayyat reported on Tuesday.

Khartoum was hit by UN diplomatic sanctions in May for allegedly harbouring three Egyptian militants accused of involvement in the June 1995 foiled attack in Ethiopia on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Among the national who did attend were Iraq and Libya who US President Bill Clinton picked out on Sunday, along with Iran, as 'states that sponsor or commit terrorism calling for a strong sanctions' against them.

By the strategy Arab nations would commit to strengthening the punishments against perpetrators of terrorist acts and to freeze and seize monies directed to these acts a final statement issued by the session said.

It also calls for 'strengthening the cooperation against terrorism between the members by exchange of help in searching for, investigating and arresting fugitives accused of or convicted of terrorist crimes.'

BRIEFLY

US actress Claudette Colbert dies: Claudette Colbert, the queen of 1930s Hollywood comedies, died on Tuesday at her home in Barbados, local police and funeral officials said. She was 92. Reuter reports from Bridgetown.

She died at 3 pm. (1900 GMT) in her home, a police officer said. 'She suffered a stroke three years ago and has been ill since then.' A local funeral home confirmed they were making funeral arrangements.

Netanyahu to visit Amman Monday: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is to make his first official visit to Amman on Monday for talks with King Hussein, his office said Tuesday, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

The visit was originally scheduled for last week but delayed for technical reasons. Since his victory over Shimon Peres in the May 29 elections right wing leader Netanyahu has visited the United States and Egypt, the only Arab state apart from Jordan to have signed a peace treaty with Israel.

Quake rocks western Manila: An intense earthquake was recorded about 120 kilometres (72 miles) west of the Philippine capital Manila early yesterday, the royal Hong Kong observatory said, Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

The quake, estimated at 5.7 on the Richter Scale, was recorded at 1.41 a.m. (1741 GMT Tuesday). The epicentre was initially determined to be off the west coast of Philippine islands, about 120 km (70 miles) west of Manila at 14.6°N 119.9°E, the observatory said.

Fire claims 3 Filipinos in Tokyo: A Filipino and two of her three children were killed in a pre-dawn fire Wednesday at a Tokyo apartment, police said, AP reports from Tokyo.

Police identified the victims as Mary Rose Saito, 27, of the Philippines, her daughter Kaori, 6, and son Masaki, 2. Saito's 1-year-old daughter Mika is in critical conditions with serious burns. Fire department officials said cause of the fire was not immediately known. The fire broke out from Saito's second-floor apartment in downtown Tokyo while the family was sleeping, police said.

Aruna cremated with due respect: The mortal remains of veteran freedom fighter Aruna Asaf Ali were cremated with police honours in New Delhi Thursday evening, PTI reports from New Delhi.

Police personnel reversed their arms amidst gun salute and buglers sounded the last post as the cremation took place after the rituals were performed according to vedic rites. The Prime Minister, H D Deve Gowda, who came to pay homage before the procession started for the crematorium, recited some shlokas in Kannada.

China executes 9 for robbery: China has executed nine men convicted of stealing 1.2 million yuan (145,000 US dollars) from train and bus passengers, the official media reported Wednesday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The nine, who hailed from three Chinese provinces, roamed through their local districts holding up entire buses, the China Youth Daily said. Three of the convicts also preyed on long-distance train passengers robbing them after slipping sleeping pills into their drinks.

Stampede kills 13 in S Africa: UP to 13 commuters were killed in a stampede at a railway station near Johannesburg yesterday when inspectors cracked down on people travelling without tickets, Reuter reports from Johannesburg.

Apparently it was a misunderstanding between commuters and ticket inspectors 13 people are dead, metro rail Area Manager Michael Khumalo said in a radio interview from the scene. 'I'm told that 12 to 13 people were killed in some sort of a stampede,' police inspector Kamal Shivanand said.

Israeli police detain PLO legislator: Israeli police on Tuesday detained a Palestinian legislator, Abbas Zaki, as he crossed from Jordan into the West Bank, the speaker of the Palestinian legislature said, AP reports from Ramallah.

'This is a very dangerous action,' the speaker, Ahmed Qureia, told the legislative council during a session in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Israeli police were not immediately available for comment. The Palestinians contend that Israeli police have no right to detain members of the 88-seat legislature, which administers Palestinian self rule in the West Bank and Gaza.

US to provide Jordan F-16 planes: The United States will provide Jordan on lease 16 F-16 fighting Falcon warplanes, the Pentagon announced on Monday, Xinhua says from Washington.

The five-year lease agreement was signed by Robert Bauerlein, Deputy Under Secretary of the US air force, and Field Marshal Abdal Afiz Marei Kaabneh, the head of Jordan's armed forces. The bulk of the 220 million dollar deal, agreed on January 7 by US Defence Secretary William Perry and Jordan's King Hussein, will be paid for by the United States, and delivery of the planes, 12 F-16 a single-seat and 4 F-16b two seat aircraft, will begin in December 1997 defence officials said.

LRA rebels kill 58 in northern Uganda

KAMPALA, July 31: Rebels killed 58 people, including 40 government soldiers, in two attacks in northern Uganda on Monday, army officers said yesterday.

The officers told Reuters a group of Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels attacked a military post near Karuma on the river Nile on Monday and killed some 40 soldiers in a two-hour battle.

A group of LRA fighters had earlier on Monday attacked Pabbo village north of Gulu, the regional capital 345 km (215 miles) north of Kampala, and killed 18 civilians, residents said.

Terrorists make Israel world's most security conscious country

JERUSALEM, July 31: Handbags are searched in grocery stores. Guards frisk patrons at movie theaters. Bomb pits are dug outside schools in case explosives are found. Passengers are asked to show up at the airport three hours in advance. The constant threat of terrorism has made Israel one of the most security-conscious countries on earth, reports AP.

'I wouldn't call it paranoia, but there is a security awareness in this country,' said national police spokesman Eric Bar-Chen.

Nobody can prove that such measures work. Suicide attacks by Islamic militants claimed the lives of 69 people so far this year, and hardly a week goes by without a drive-by shooting, a stabbing, an infiltration attempt or a bomb threat.

But Israelis believe the efforts are effective, and they pay a lot for the extra precautions, even though the result is often tantamount to security mania.

'Living with terror is our fate,' said Ran Cohen, a liberal member of parliament and a reserve army colonel, 'and we are a paratroop unit. We need every civilian to be very concerned about the possibility that a terrorist is not far away from him.'

That concern is spreading to the United States. A bomb killed one woman and injured more than 100 people at the Olympics in Atlanta last weekend, and evidence is mounting that a bomb caused TWA flight 800 to explode over New York on July 17, killing all 230 people aboard.

The attacks may force the US to take more stringent measures than its citizens are used to — including state-of-the-art bomb detectors for airports that cost up to 1 million dollars said Yisrael Shai, former head of Shin Bet's VIP bodyguard unit and now a partner in a private security firm.

'Americans should prepare themselves not only for the small discomforts that will come with increased security but also for the big financial expenditure,' said Shai, whose company sold bomb-resistant garbage bins to Atlanta for the games.

Shai noted that on recent domestic flights he took in the United States, security was 'lacking, almost non-existent.'

Signs of increased security

Serbs to bar UN investigators from exhuming graves in Srebrenica

PALE, Bosnia, July 31: Bosnian Serb leaders said on Tuesday they will bar UN investigators from exhuming graves linked to the fall of Srebrenica, alleging that Muslim-Croat authorities were blocking Serb probes of graves elsewhere, reports Reuter.

The Bosnian Serb cabinet said it was 'forced' to take the decision and accused the Muslim-Croat federation of obstructing Serb investigations of suspected mass grave sites, the Bosnian Serb news agency reported.

'We were forced to make this decision because of growing pressure from the public, which will no longer allow the search to go on for alleged mass graves in Srebrenica while at the same time work is stopped on the exhumation of the bodies of Serb soldiers and civilians buried in mass graves in the Muslim-Croat federation,' it quoted Bosnian Serb Prime Minister Gojko Kljickovic as saying.

Experts sent by the UN war crimes tribunal have been examining mass graves on Serb territory believed to contain Muslim victims killed by conquering Serb forces last summer following the fall of the eastern Srebrenica enclave.

Kljickovic's statement apparently referred to Serb media reports this week that Croat police in western Bosnia have tried to obstruct a Serb exhumation of a suspected mass grave site near the town of Glamoč.

A spokesman for Bildt in Sarajevo said the high representative's office had yet to receive any formal communication from Pale threatening such a move.

Duncan Bullivant said any attempt to block the work of the UN war crimes tribunal in the Hague would be a clear violation of the Dayton peace agreement signed last December.

Tribunal investigators temporarily suspended their work at mass graves around Nova Kasaba late last week to wait for NATO troops to search the sites for possible mines, or booby traps.

No serious violence has occurred since the war crimes investigators began their work in eastern Bosnia under guard by heavily-armed US troops in the NATO-led Peace Implementation Force (IFOR).



A Palestinian woman carries her belongings on her way to work in Abu Dis village, near Jerusalem on Tuesday. Israel eased its blockade of the West Bank to allow 13,000 Palestinians to get to their jobs in the Jewish state. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Two-headed baby girl
TIJUANA MEXICO: A two-headed baby girl born last Friday in a Tijuana hospital was in serious but stable condition on Tuesday, the hospital said, reports Reuter.

The child has serious heart malformations, said Alejandro Lira, a doctor at Notre Dame Hospital.

Her state is serious but stable, Lira said.

Money owed to Shakespeare's father to be repaid after 400 years
LONDON: Money owed to William Shakespeare's father, who was mayor of Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1599, will be paid back to his civic successor almost 400 years late, The Daily Express newspaper said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Derrick Smithers, who has followed the father of England's most famous bard into Stratford town hall, was due to drive to Marlborough, southwest England, where the town's mayor, Charles Bates, will land over the 21 pounds (32 dollars) at a public ceremony.

But Marlborough has decided not to repay interest on the debt, which would be worth about 150,000 pounds (230,000 dollars) at today's price.

Paying back such a sum would have cast the town into financial ruin forever more, the mayor said.

Bates said that the 21 pounds would be given to charity. He added that it was Britain's oldest recorded unpaid debt.

Good news for baldheads
HELSINKI: Researchers have succeeded in isolating the gene responsible for hair growth which could eventually lead to medication to combat baldness, the scientist in charge of a study announced here Tuesday, reports AFP.

The mutation of this gene cause a skin sickness that translates into a lack of sweat glands, teeth that refuse to develop properly and baldness, said Juha Kere, a professor at the University of Helsinki who headed up the international research team.

The gene is found in the X-chromosome common to both women and men, but the effect in women conversely begins.

The discovery constitutes a major success in the perennial male struggle against receding hairlines, because while the gene has been known to scientists since the 1970s, they were never able to isolate it, Kere said.

It would take 10 years for medicine fighting baldness to hit pharmacy shelves, Kere said.

The study is to be published in the August issue of 'Nature Genetics.'

Trading human flesh
MOSCOW: Police in the rural town of Berezniki have arrested four men suspected of trading in human flesh which was sold to consumers as veal, ITAR-Tass news agency reported Tuesday, says AFP.

Police were tipped off after a local resident brought in a sample of the meat, dubious about its origins and a medical expert confirmed that it came from a human being, a senior police official told ITAR-Tass.

The corpse of an elderly man was discovered in a local apartment during a subsequent police investigation.

Saudi Arabia assures US of protecting its troops
RIYADH, July 31: Defence Secretary William Perry travels Wednesday to a base in southern Saudi Arabia — the future home of US troops being moved from elsewhere in the kingdom as a precaution against terrorism, reports AP.

Perry's Saudi counterpart, Prince Sultan, assured him Tuesday that the kingdom is doing all it could to protect the 5,000 US troops in Saudi Arabia, Saudi officials said speaking on condition of anonymity.

Perry's trip was prompted by last month's truck bombing at a military complex in Dhahran, the second of two bombings in Saudi Arabia that have killed a total of 24 Americans since November.

While the Pentagon has refused all comment on the trip, Perry reportedly planned to ask the Saudis for help paying for increased security for the US troops here.

Saudi sources said the Saudi defense minister would not commit to sharing the expenses, apparently on the grounds that current safeguards are adequate, although he promised to cooperate with the United States on security issues.

'The kingdom is capable of ensuring the security of every citizen and resident on its land,' the sources quoted Sultan as saying during the three-hour meeting in the Red Sea port of Jeddah.

The Pentagon did not respond to requests for comment on the Saudi account of Tuesday's meeting.

Perry is expected to raise security issues again in talks with King Fahd.

The officials said Perry praised the Saudis for the quick arrest of four suspects in the November bombing of a US-run military training center in Riyadh. That bombing killed five Americans and two Indians.

Pravda stops publication
MOSCOW, July 31: Pravda, the Communist newspaper founded by Vladimir Lenin in 1912, has stopped publishing, AP reports from Moscow.

The paper's Greek owners, who have been feuding with the editor, closed it down last week after being denied entry to the Pravda building, reports AP.

Pravda has suspended publication at least twice in recent years, once because of similar dispute, and it was unclear whether the struggling paper was closing its doors for good.

The owners, brothers Christos and Theodoros Giannikos, who are co-directors of Pravda International, are still putting out a tabloid newspaper called Pravda Pyat (Pravda Five) under a separate editorial staff.