

BRIEF

Arafat frees 20 Hamas prisoners: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat released 20 Hamas prisoners on Sunday, a day after the Islamic militant group threatened an uprising against his rule. AP reports from Tulkarem.

Izzeddin Shari, governor of the northern West Bank city of Tulkarem, said the prisoners were released on the recommendation of a ministerial committee set up by Arafat to investigate riots in the city last Friday.

Floods claim 174 in Nepal: The Nepalese Home Ministry yesterday put the toll of flood and landslide victims at 174 following heavy rains last month, but meteorologists predict the monsoon would end imminently, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The count included 111 confirmed dead and 63 reported missing in devastating floods that hit 30 of Nepal's 75 districts, a ministry official said yesterday, although others put the toll at more than 210. Over 9,000 houses have been damaged by the landslides and floods in different districts during the month of July, the official said.

DPRK detains ROK novelist: North Korea said yesterday it had detained a South Korean who identified himself as a novelist for violating its northern frontier, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

An unidentified South Korean was apprehended by a relevant agency of the DPRK at dawn on July 31 when he illegally violated its northern frontier. Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said in a report monitored in Tokyo.

Strong quake hits Pacific: A powerful earthquake with a magnitude of 6.7 rattled the Pacific around the Tonga Islands, about 310 kilometres (192 miles) from American Samoa, Monday morning, Hong Kong's Royal Observatory said. AP reports from Hong Kong.

The US Geological Survey in California and the Japanese Central Meteorological Agency in Tokyo said there were no reports of damage or casualties in the area. Pat Jorgenson, spokeswoman for the US Geological Survey, said the quake hit the floor of the ocean so it didn't affect any of the islands. A magnitude 6 quake can cause severe damage in populated areas.

DPRK flood death toll now 200: Floods which swept through large areas of North Korea last month killed more than 200 people and destroyed 20 per cent of the country's annual crop harvest, the World Food Programme's director in Pyongyang said in an interview published yesterday. Reuter reports from Tokyo.

The aid agency's Robert Hauser said in an interview with the Japanese daily Asahi Shimbun conducted on Sunday that "at least 200 people" died from the flood, although the final count has not been completed by North Korean government.

Rebels attack Peruvian town: Dozens of Maoist rebels attacked a police station in a central jungle town, killing three officers, two civilians and several guerrillas also died, a newspaper reported, AP says from Lima.

The five-hour attack occurred Friday night in Aucayacu, 240 miles (385 kilometres) northeast of Lima in the Upper Huallaga River Valley, a drug trafficking centre and Peru's most violent region. Between 100 and 200 rebels, presumed to be Shining Path guerrillas, searched for Aucayacu's authorities and then ambushed the police station near the central square, the daily El Comercio reported Sunday.

Road mishap kills 5 in Kazakhstan: A bus careened off a mountain road in Kazakhstan when its brakes failed, killing five people and injuring more than 20, the ITAR Tass news agency reported Monday. AP reports from Kazakhstan.

The accident occurred Sunday night in the northeastern corner of the former Soviet republic, between Ust-Kamenogorsk and Zyranka, the report said. The driver tried to stop the bus by bumping against a rock, but the vehicle already was moving too fast and the impact sent it tumbling, the news agency said.

FIS lawyer kidnapped in Algeria: A lawyer for Algeria's banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) has been kidnapped by unidentified assailants, the attorney's office said yesterday. AFP reports from Algiers.

Rachid Mesli was seized near Rouiba, 25 kilometres (15 miles) east of Algiers, on Wednesday and driven off by the four-strong gang. There has been no news of him since then. Mesli was one of a number of lawyers who recently signed a petition to legal authorities asking them to disclose where FIS number two Ali Belhadj was being held and to allow them access to him.

Chinese team in Libya: A Chinese parliamentary delegation arrived in the Libyan capital Tripoli late Sunday on a visit Libyan television reported, AFP says from London.

Monitored by the BBC, the television said the delegation was led by Zhu Qizhen, member of the standing committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) and vice chairman of the NPC's foreign affairs committee.

Drug baron shot dead in Cape Town: Masked Muslim vigilantes shot and burned a suspected drug baron to death on Sunday in a showdown over rising drug trafficking and gangsterism in Cape Town's working class suburbs, Reuter reports from Cape Town.

Intelligence agencies call for increased security in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD, Aug 5: Intelligence agencies warning of a possible terrorist attack on the Pakistani capital have called for increased security throughout the city, a newspaper reported Monday, says AP.

Quoting Islamabad police and the Federal Investigation Agency, The English-language daily, The News, said additional security forces would be deployed near the prime minister's house and other key government buildings.

Last month, United States Embassy officials warned that Pakistan may be among several countries targeted for terrorist attacks.

An embassy advisory counselled US citizens living in Pakistan to take additional precautions.

Pakistan has been rattled by a devastating suicide bombing that killed 17 people at the Egyptian Embassy last year and a string of 13 bombings in Central Punjab province so far this year.

Last month, nine people were killed when a bomb rocked the international airport in the Punjab provincial capital, Lahore.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto recently announced the arrest of two men suspected in some of the Punjab bombings, including the airport blast.

Their identities have not been revealed, but Benazir said they were working for a foreign country. Pakistan in the past has accused India of orchestrating the bombings.

Erbakan expels 13 armed forces officers

ANKARA, Aug 5: Thirteen officers were expelled from the Turkish armed forces on the grounds that they had been involved in Islamic fundamentalist activities, the Turkish press said today, reports AFP.

The decision, also approved by the new Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, was made at an annual meeting of top commanders that ended Sunday, the newspapers said.

Erbakan, who had criticised the sacking of fundamentalist officers from the armed forces before coming to power in late June, had no objection to the decision.

The influential military abides strictly by the secular principles of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

EU faces abandoning its mission in Mostar as talks break down

MOSTAR, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Aug 5: European leaders faced abandoning their two-year mission to unite Muslims and Croats in the divided city of Mostar after Bosnian Croats refused Monday to accept local election results that gave Muslims an edge, reports AP.

The failure of a final attempt at compromise delivered another blow to international efforts to keep the Balkan peace, imperilling the Muslim-Croat federation that is to rule half of Bosnia and boding ill for Sept. 14 national elections.

The European Union, which has administered Mostar since 1994 in hopes of calming Muslim-Croat rivalry in the southern city, had threatened to leave if Bosnian Croats didn't accept June election results by midnight Saturday.

The stalemate came two days after the United States had announced an agreement on Mostar the result of a meeting between President Clinton and Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, the Bosnian Croats patron.

Croats have boycotted the city council, complaining of voting irregularities after a Muslim-led coalition won a narrow majority in June.

Bowing to international pressure, the Croats proposed a compromise Sunday in which they would abide by the election results until the federation's constitutional court — which has yet to be formed — rules on their election complaints.

Croats made their acceptance conditional on there being no more city council sessions between Thursday, when

a Mostar mayor is to be elected, and any ruling from the constitutional court.

But Sunday's talks broke down after seven hours over the Muslim side's insistence on a deadline for the constitutional court ruling that would resolve the disputed elections, said the mayor of Muslim eastern Mostar, Safet Orucovic.

"We had some moving, some progress during the talks," said Dragan Gasic, the EU spokesman in Mostar.

"But sometimes I thought we were moving in a circle. Both sides were trying hard, but they couldn't find common language."

Gasic said he did not expect any talks between the sides on Monday — only a decision by the EU on withdrawing from Mostar.

"Sadly, no agreement, no

reconciliation," said Sir Martin Garrod, the European Union's chief in Mostar.

Garrod warned that the stalemate in Mostar could have "very serious implications on the whole Dayton peace accord and the peace process in general."

International officials fear failure in Mostar will hurt the shaky Muslim-Croat federation meant to be a counterweight to the Bosnian Serb government under the peace agreement. They also say it sets a bad precedent for Bosnia-wide elections next month by suggesting that anyone dissatisfied with results could merely refuse to recognise them.

In Washington, the White House expressed disappointment at the failure in Mostar.

"We are greatly disappointed that the local Bosnia

Croat leadership in Mostar rejected the European Union compromise for establishing a Mostar city government," said White House spokesperson Kathy McKeeman.

She said the failure was particularly disturbing in light of the assurances by Tudjman, whose aides traveled from Washington to Bosnia to try to obtain Bosnian Croat cooperation.

Garrod was concerned the Mostar crisis could trigger more of the Muslim-Croat fighting that ravaged central and southern Bosnia for a year before the federation was formed in March 1994.

Animosities persist as hard-liners on both sides follow national interests.

"I am worried about the city becoming totally divided again," Garrod said. "We are all

aware that tensions are below the surface."

As EU leaders mulled their response, the NATO-led peace force in Bosnia increased patrols — mainly with French soldiers — in the region, said Maj. Brett Boudreau, a NATO spokesman.

The peace force, however, is not sending additional troops to the Mostar region. Boudreau said NATO would wait for word from the EU before making any major moves.

If the EU pulls out, NATO will take control of Mostar, patrolling the city with unarmed UN police officers as they do in the rest of the country.

The clock is now ticking towards the gradual European Union withdrawal," said Carl Bildt, who directs the civilian implementation of the Bosnian peace accord.

PPP takes up 4 seats in ruling coalition in Baluchistan

ISLAMABAD, Aug 5: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) took up four seats in the coalition ruling Baluchistan province on Sunday, the official news agency AFP said, reports Reuter.

The PPP rules at a national level and now has a presence in all the country's provincial governments.

AFP said all four PPP deputies in the Baluchistan provincial assembly had been given ministerial status in the government of independent Chief Minister Zulfiqar Ali Magsi.

It captured power in the North West Frontier Province in early 1994 after the dismissal of a PML-led coalition there.

Sniper wounds Chandrika's bodyguard

Over 300 soldiers, Tigers killed in battle for northern town

COLOMBO, Aug 5: At least 300 Sri Lankan government soldiers and Tamil Tiger guerrillas were killed in a major battle for a northern rebel-held town over the weekend, the Defence Ministry and the Tigers said today, reports Reuter.

Government troops killed at least 203 rebels as it advanced on Kilinochchi town on Sunday, the Defence Ministry said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in its own account of the battle that aid officials says has left nearly 200,000 people homeless, said its guerrillas had killed at least 100 troops and destroyed five army tanks.

More than 100 Sri Lankan troops were killed and five Sri Lankan Army tanks completely destroyed when the LTTE forces opened fire on Sri Lankan troops who broke out of Paranthan and advanced towards Kilinochchi town in an attempt to capture it, an LTTE statement said.

A Defence Ministry statement said 14 troops were

killed, including an officer, near Paranthan, an outpost of Kilinochchi.

"Due to the confrontation on August 4, one officer and 13 soldiers were killed and 32 soldiers were wounded," the ministry said. "Ground troops have confirmed 203 terrorists were killed and estimate over one hundred were injured."

The advance recommenced this morning and the latest reports indicate that the terrorists are offering resistance," the Defence Ministry said.

The troops moved out of the Paranthan outpost on Sunday after launching a major advance on July 26 on the town, 229 km (142 miles) north of Colombo, in the latest upsurge in fighting in the 13-year-old war.

The offensive was launched shortly after the army's worst defeat of the war, in which some 3,000 guerrillas overran the Mullaitivu base on the northeast coast, killing or capturing almost the entire garrison of more than 1,000 men.

The LTTE said air force planes bombed civilian targets, killing five people. There has been no official comment on the claim.

Air force bomber pounded rebel positions on Sunday as troops resume their advance after a week-long lull.

LTTE boats were apparently trying to attack the troops from a lagoon to be west of Kilinochchi, but the Defence Ministry said Lankan naval patrol boats were keeping them at bay.

Aid officials said they were preparing 35 schools in and around the frontline town of Vavuniya, 70 km (44 miles) south of Kilinochchi, to accommodate the anticipated influx of refugees.

AP adds, A sniper shot and wounded one of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's bodyguards at a Buddhist shrine that she was scheduled to visit in central Sri Lanka, police said Monday.

Mrs Kumaratunga had cancelled her visit to the shrine at the last moment for security reasons. The shrine is

only 50 kilometres (30 miles) from areas controlled by Tamil rebels.

The policeman of the elite Presidential Security Division was standing next to the holy Sri Maha Bodhiya tree in Anuradhapura city when he was shot in the shoulder, at about 7 pm (1230 GMT) Sunday, officials said on condition of anonymity.

No one heard the gunshot. Police were hunting for a sniper believed to have fired a high-powered rifle with a silencer from a distance. The policeman was later hospitalised, police said.

President Kumaratunga was returning to Colombo, the capital, at the time of the attack. She had earlier attended a public meeting at a town close to Anuradhapura, 160 kilometres (100 miles) north of Colombo.

There was no official statement on the attack, and police did not name any suspects. Police were unable to say why the sniper shot the policeman.

ROK prosecutors for Chun's death sentence

SEOUL, Aug 5: South Korean prosecutors asked a Seoul criminal court today to sentence former president Chun Doo Hwan to death on charges of sedition and treason, state television said, reports Reuter.

Senior prosecutor Kim Sang-Hee said Chun, who is charged with sedition, treason and bribery, should be given the maximum penalty, the Korea Broadcasting System said. Kim asked the court to sentence his successor Roh Tae Woo, who faces the same charges, to life in prison.

Kim told the court Chun and Roh must be punished severely so that this trial serve as a historic landmark by showing that laws and justice rule this land.

Chun is accused of masterminding a 1979 coup, that thrust him to power, and a 1980 army massacre in the southern city of Kwangju. Roh is accused of playing a leading role in the coup and the massacre.

Taliban fix up grip on pro-govt faction's base

ISLAMABAD, Aug 5: The Islamic Taliban opposition militia said today it had consolidated its grip on an important military base of the pro-government Hezb-I-Islami faction in eastern Afghanistan, reports Reuter.

The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press quoted a Taliban spokesman in Peshawar as saying that Taliban fighters had mopped up all resistance in the Tabout area, 45 km (28 miles) east of Urgan in Pakhtika province, by Sunday evening.

The spokesman, Maulvi Ahmed Jan, said 30 Hezb-I-Islami fighters had been killed and about 100 captured since the Taliban attacked the base on Thursday. He gave no figure for Taliban casualties.

Tutsi-led army killed thousands of Hutus in Burundi, says a UN report

The Tutsi-led army in Burundi killed thousands of Hutu civilians between April and July, a UN report said.

The UN report, a copy of which was obtained by AFP today, was the first mention of these new massacres in the violence-wrecked Central African country.

It was prepared by a team of five UN observers who went to Burundi on April 19 for a human rights fact-finding mission. They were based in Bujumbura, but also went out into rural areas.

The report, stated for release today, said that the last few months in Burundi had been marked by the massacres of civilians, assassinations, disappearances and arbitrary arrests.



Finalists of the Elite 1996 Model Look pose for photographers during press preview before the final selection in Kuala Lumpur Sunday. The selected winner will represent Malaysia to the International final in France September 17 this year.

Israel to honour ex-govt's pledge to withdraw troops from Hebron

TEL AVIV, Israel, Aug 5: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has decided to honour the previous government's pledge to withdraw Israeli troops from the West Bank city of Hebron, and will order a redeployment within weeks, as Israeli TV station reported Sunday, reports AP.

A government spokesman denied the report.

Since his May victory, the hard-line leader has been evasive on the Hebron issue, which the Palestinians see as a key test of the new government's sincerity about peace-making.

The pullout from Hebron, the last West Bank city under Israeli occupation, was initially scheduled for March. But former premier Shimon Peres delayed the move after a series of deadly terrorist attacks in Israel by Islamic militants ear-

lier this year.

During his campaign, Netanyahu said he would seek to hold onto the city, a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalist supporters where 450 Jewish settlers live among 94,000 Arabs.

While accepting his predecessor's commitments in principle, Netanyahu has argued that some deviations to the plan are legitimate because the Palestinians were also not honouring all their pledges to Israel, such as handing over captured Islamic militants.

But Israel's Channel 2 TV, citing anonymous government sources, said Netanyahu has now decided to seek only minor changes to the plan, which envisaged Israeli troops remaining only in a small enclave where the settlers live.

The report said the issue would be discussed next week between Palestinian leader

Yasser Arafat and Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai. The government would then formally decide on a pullout which could begin before the end of August, it said.

Asked for confirmation, Netanyahu's spokesman Shai Bazak said only: "No decision has been made. There is no schedule."

Meanwhile Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu makes his first official visit to Jordan on Monday to explore ways to revive stalled peace negotiations between Syria and the Jewish state.

Netanyahu's visit comes only two days after Jordan's King Hussein met with Syrian President Hafez Assad in Damascus. Jordan's friendly relations with Israel give Hussein a chance to mediate between Israel and its main Arab foe.



A farmer's vehicle sticks under a sedan Sunday in the Shui village of the mountainous country of Nantou in central Taiwan. Typhoon Herb which hit Taiwan last week created a death toll of at least 40, and more are expected as a number of people have been reported missing. Nantou was one of the worst hit by the Typhoon.

Security tightened in Kashmir ahead of Gowda's visit

JAMMU, India, Aug 5: Security was tightened in this Kashmir winter capital today for Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's second visit to the troubled Muslim majority state ahead of legislative polls next month, reports AFP.

Police said more than 16,000 paramilitary troops and crack commandos fanned out across Jammu, conducting search operations pre-empting any violence during Deve Gowda's stay in this Hindu dominated city.

At least 500 people were detained as a precautionary measure and barricades put up in Jammu which has a population of 800,000 police said. The security force patrolled

the streets in bullet proof vehicles.

We do not want to take any chances on the prime minister's security, Kashmir spokesman Lieutenant General D D Sankani said.

Deve Gowda's visit here follows a trip last month to Srinagar, the state summer capital and urban hub of the Muslim separatist drive in Kashmir, the only province in Hindu dominated India.

Deve Gowda's United Front government which took office on June 1, plans to hold state assembly polls in the disputed Himalayan territory next month, the first legislative elections in the federally administered state in nine years.

Off the Record

Discovery by chance

CAIRO: A rose granite statue believed to be of Ramses II has been found close to the Giza Pyramids, which were built before the powerful Pharaoh's reign, the Egyptian Antiquities Authority said Sunday.

The statue was discovered by chance lying on the ground by workers who were cleaning the area behind the smallest of the three pyramids, the head of the Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities, Abdel-Halim Nureddin, told AFP.

The statue, which is more than three metres (10 feet) long and is broken in two, is unfinished and bears the characteristics of a king and a god. We think that the king is Ramses II and the god is Ra Horakhty, one of the forms of the god Ra represented by the Sphinx itself, Nureddin said. The theory is based on "the traits, the proportions, the style" of the statue but also on the fact that Ramses II "was linked to this representation of Ra, to whom his Temple Abu Simbel" in upper Egypt is dedicated, he said.

"We think that Ramses II, if it is indeed him, dedicated something to the Sphinx, it could have been a statue, chapel, a small temple, a steel. We are still researching this," he said. The statue did not have an inscription.

"This is the first time that we find a statue of Ramses II in this area," he said.

Ramses II (1298-1235 BC), renowned for the length of his reign and his military campaigns, lived under the new kingdom, close to 13 centuries after the building of the Giza Pyramids under the old kingdom.

CIA suspects Iran may be linked to TWA jet blast

NEW YORK, Aug 5: The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) suspects Iran may be linked to the crash of TWA Flight 800, Time magazine reported on Sunday, citing a well-placed US intelligence source, reports Reuter.

Time reported the source said that calls and transmissions tracked by the CIA out of Tehran "have raised suspicions" there is an Iranian connection to the disaster that killed 230 people when the TWA Boeing 747 blew up as it left New York on July 17.

The CIA and US State Department were not immediately available to comment on the Time magazine report.

Time said the CIA is also looking at intelligence reports on a meeting of "terrorist" leaders in Iran the month before the crash to see if any "green light" was given for an attack.

"There's a hard look being taken at the Iran possibility," a senior US intelligence official was quoted as saying in the magazine's latest edition.

The official added, however, that the intelligence gathered so far was "vague, nothing solid," though still " tantalizing," Time said.

US investigators have still not determined the cause of the TWA disaster.

US Defence Secretary William Perry, referring to a truck bomb that killed 19 US servicemen in Saudi Arabia in June, called Iran the leading candidate for international terrorism against the United States.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Javed Zarif, appearing on CNN on Sunday, repeated that Iran denied any involvement in the Saudi bombing or any terrorist incident for that matter," Zarif said.