

## International

## BRIEFLY

**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.

Izzedin Sharif, 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 has 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 Zyranya, 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 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 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 counseled US citizens living in Pakistan to take additional precautions.

**Erbakan expels 13 armed forces officers:**

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 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 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.

**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 said. "Ground troops have confirmed 203 terrorists were killed and estimate over one hundred were injured."

The advance recommended this morning and the latest reports indicate that the terrorists are offering resistance," 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."

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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

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

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 the west of Kilinochchi, but the Defence Ministry said Lankan naval patrol boats were keeping them at bay.

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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."

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

When an American-led UN task force entered Somalia in

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 Bodhi tree in Anuradhapura city when he was shot in the shoulder, at about 7 pm (1230 gm) 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.

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**Rivals threaten to revoke ceasefire****Hussein Aidid new Somali faction leader**

MOGADISHU, Aug 5: A former US Marine reservist who served in Somalia has been named leader of a Somali faction, succeeding his father, the warlord who humiliated US troops by eluding capture, reports AP.

A corporal trained as an artilleryman, he served two weeks in Somalia, but left before US forces began chasing down his father in 1993. Eighteen American troops and 300 Somalis were killed in a botched raid on the elder Aidid's headquarters forcing President Clinton to speed up the withdrawal of US forces.

Afghan strongman Ali Mahdi Mohamed was named Sunday to replace Gen. Mohamed Farrah Aidid, who died last week. The elder Aidid, 61, was wounded in recent fighting over a south Mogadishu neighbourhood.

The appointment of the younger Aidid, 31, dampened hopes that the general's death would lead to reconciliation in Somalia. Earlier Sunday, Aidid supporters formally rejected a proposal from rival faction leaders for negotiations between Somalia's 16 warring factions.

The Horn of Africa nation of 8 million has been without effective central government since 1991, when it dissolved into a collection of fiefdoms after the overthrow of former dictator Mohamed Siad Barre. More than 350,000 Somalis since have died from starvation or in fighting.

Ali Mahdi told AP that his ally Osman Hassan Ali "atto," might revoke his ceasefire too.

Both Mogadishu warlords declared unilateral truces after General Mohamed Farrah Aidid died Thursday, having been wounded a week earlier in a battle in the south of the capital.

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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.

— AFP/UNB photo

**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.

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 Rabin.

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.

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 Shuili 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.

— AFP/UNB photo

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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.

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