

Thousands of Khmers defect to govt

PHNOM PENH, Aug 8: Thousands of Khmer Rouge guerrillas, among the top officials, defected to the government today. Co-Premier Hun Sen said, and the rebels' radio hinted they included the former number two, Leng Sary, reports AFP.

The announcement came two months after Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot was reported to have died. "I am glad to tell you that SOK Pheap, Division 450, and Mit Chien, Division 415, have joined the government," Hun Sen said in a speech commemorating the inauguration of a new television station.

He said about 3,000 guerrillas had defected with the two commanders. He then interrupted his speech to take a phone call and said he had just received "more good news that some of the other senior leaders will also come along."

Meanwhile, clandestine Khmer Rouge radio, monitored by AFP in Bangkok, accused

Leng Sary, the former foreign minister of the Khmer Rouge's government of Democratic Kampuchea, of being a traitor and of "selling out."

Mit Chien was the "mayor" of the rebel economic base at Pailin in the northwest provinces of Battambang and commander of the guerrillas' Division 415.

Sok Pheap was the commander of Division 450 based at the rebel's main military base of Phnom Malai in the northwest province of Banteay Meanchey.

"They cut themselves from the Khmer Rouge and came to join the royal government today," Hun Sen said, adding that the defections had been negotiated for two months.

Military analysts said the defections could be a fatal blow to the rebel movement.

Earlier report says: Two Khmer Rouge officials, the most senior ever to defect, joined Cambodia's government today.

Chechens still in control of streets in centre Grozny

GROZNY, Aug 8: Violent fighting resumed at dawn today in Grozny where pro-independence fighters were still in control of streets in the centre of the Chechen capital, reports AFP.

Russian helicopters could be heard firing at regular intervals on rebel positions in the outskirts of Staropromyslovsky Et Zavodskoy. A rebel commander, Sultan Baskhayev, said the Chechens controlled the entire centre of the capital. But he acknowledged indirectly that after two days of fighting they had not yet taken any government buildings which symbolise Russian control over the city.

AP adds: Russian warplanes strafed the burning Chechen capital as government forces fought for control of the city's centre against the biggest rebel offensive since a spring cease-fire.

Rebels surrounded soldiers holding checkpoints and government buildings on Wednesday.

Serbs ban further exhumation of mass graves on their territory

BELGRADE, Aug 8: Bosnian Serbs have banned further exhumation of mass graves on their territory, saying Muslims and Croats had obstructed such exhumations on their territory, the Bosnian Serb SRNA news agency reported Wednesday, reports AP.

There was no immediate reaction from international officials or representatives of the Muslim-Croat federation. If carried out, the self-styled Bosnian Serb government's ban likely would stop the largest exhumation in the Srebrenica region in eastern Bosnia.

The dispute over reciprocity started a week ago when the scheduled exhumation of 65 remaining Serb bodies from a mass grave in the village of Kamen, near the Croat-held town of Glamoc in western Bosnia, was concealed without explanation.

Iran complains to UN for US violations of its airspace

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 8: Iran complained to the United Nations Wednesday that US aircraft violated its airspace and carried out provocative acts three times last Saturday, reports Reuters.

In a letter to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Iranian UN envoy Kamal Kharrazi said a US fighter plane broke the sound barrier over Bushehr, in the northern Gulf, at 1745 and that more than 20 US F-14 and F-15 fighters were observed nearly six hours after 30 miles (50 km) south of Bushehr.

At 2300, he said, a US fighter flying from west to east violated Iranian airspace.

Clinton vows to continue search for life on Mars

WASHINGTON, Aug 8: President Bill Clinton on Wednesday vowed to continue the search for life on Mars, following the discovery of clues that primitive life forms inhabited the red planet, reports AP.

"I am determined that the American space programme will put its full intellectual power and technological prowess behind the search for further evidence of life on Mars," Clinton said at the White House.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Wednesday discussed its discovery that a simple, microscopic form of life resembling bacteria may have existed on Mars some three billion years.

That conclusion was based on evidence found in a meteorite from Mars that landed on earth about 13,000 years ago, said NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin.

Israeli jets rocket Hezbollah posts in Lebanon

BAALEEK, Lebanon, Aug 8: Israeli Air Force jets rocketed guerrilla targets in eastern Lebanon's Syrian-occupied Bekaa Valley for a second time before dawn today, security sources said, reports Reuters.

The sources said the jets fired rockets in two raids about an hour apart into targets belonging to the anti-Israeli pro-Iranian Hezbollah group near the town of Baalbek in the Bekaa.

Reuters reporter Ramez Ismail said from Baalbek that Hezbollah gunners and Syrian troops in the town fired anti-aircraft weapons at the attacking jets in the second raid.

The air attacks followed the killing of one Israeli soldier and the wounding of two others in a Hezbollah attack on their outpost in South Lebanon on Tuesday.

Hezbollah had claimed responsibility for the assault and an earlier attack on Monday.

Gowda urged to prevent passage of CTBT BNP urges govt to test, deploy nuclear arms

NEW DELHI, Aug 8: India's main opposition party urged the government on Wednesday to test and deploy nuclear weapons piling pressure on the new leaders, to block a global test ban treaty, reports Reuters.

"India must go nuclear for its own security compulsions," United News of India quoted Brijesh Mishra, the foreign affairs spokesman of the right-wing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as saying.

Mishra urged Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's two-month old government to prevent passage of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), being negotiated in Geneva. Delegates are striving to wrap up the talks by August 15.

India opposes the present draft treaty because it does not commit the nuclear powers to a timetable for total disarmament, but the BJP said the government was not vigorous enough in its stand.

India exploded a nuclear device in 1974 but says it has no nuclear weapons, experts believe India and neighbouring Pakistan could swiftly assemble nuclear arms.

"We must conduct one or more nuclear tests in order to design nuclear warheads for our missiles," the Press Trust of India quoted Mishra as saying.

Mishra adopted a tougher stand than the BJP took during the campaign for general elections earlier this year and a 12-day stint in power in May.

During the campaign, the BJP said it would reverse India's 22-year-old policy and build nuclear, but stopped short of calling for tests.

Mishra said in the Geneva talks the government was focusing on a provision which would require India to ratify the accord before it could come into force. New Delhi has said this imposes unacceptable limits on its sovereign right to decide.

Mishra said the treaty also fell short because it would neither rein in the five nuclear powers' arsenals nor prevent them from perfecting weapons in laboratory tests. The five declared nuclear powers are Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.



Four of seven Mujaheddin POWs, including a Moroccan, two Jordanians, an Algerian and two Palestinians exchanged with a Bosnian pilot by the Croatian authorities for four Croats and a Swedish mercenary, cross the Neretva River near Mostar Wednesday. Under the Dayton peace accords all prisoners were to have been freed in January. — AFP/UNB photo

Key parties attack US senator for visiting Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Aug 8: India's two main political parties attacked the US Senator Hank Brown Wednesday for visiting Kashmir, saying his trip to the strife-torn Himalayan state amounted to interference in India's domestic affairs.

Brown's visit to the state summer capital of Srinagar had, however, ended speculation that New Delhi had turned down his requests for a visit to the state.

India last year protested a campaign in the US Congress by the Republican Senator which led to the uncapping of US arms exports worth 368 million dollars to Pakistan.

New Delhi said the move would heat up an arms race in South Asia.

leader Syed Sibtey Razi a former federal home minister. Razi said the Republican Senator's two-day visit to the strife-torn Himalayan state amounted to interference in India's domestic affairs.

Former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) said Senator Brown had taken "undue advantage" of New Delhi's efforts to bring transparency to troubled Kashmir by holding meetings with Muslim separatist guerrillas in the region.

"Brown is known to have pro-Pakistan sentiments, and there are many other countries which have a vested interest in Kashmir," said Congress Party

The Congress, whose support is crucial for India's new Coalition government of Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, also criticised a recent visit to Kashmir by the US ambassador in India, Frank Wisner.

"We should not allow people to take undue advantage and meddle with the country's internal affairs," Razi, the Congress leader, told reporters.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) also attacked Senator Brown and Ambassador Wisner for holding talks with Muslim rebels and Kashmiri politicians saying such visits should be discouraged.



Russian soldiers carry their dead and wounded comrades to send them by helicopter out of Grozny, on Wednesday as Chechen rebels continued their attack on the headquarters of the pro-Moscow government in central Grozny. — AFP/UNB photo

US, China reach accord on CTBT

GENEVA, Aug 8: In a breakthrough deal with US negotiators, China has agreed to support a historic global ban on nuclear test explosions, Western diplomats said, reports AP.

That leaves India as the lone holdout on the compromise treaty developed by the 61-nation Conference on Disarmament.

Western diplomats who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity said the reversal came Tuesday as Chinese and US negotiators agreed on rules governing inspections of suspected violators.

China had objected to a provision requiring a simple majority vote of a 51-nation executive council to order an inspection.

It said it would not accept the treaty unless the majority required was raised to three-quarters, or 38 votes, which would make it harder to call an inspection. US and Chinese negotiators agreed on a 30-vote compromise, the diplo-

mat said Wednesday. The deal is also thought to include assurances from Washington on the surveillance methods that can be used as a basis for inspections — an other Beijing concern.

The other declared nuclear powers — Britain, France and Russia — were expected to approve the deal between China and the United States.

The agreement was to be announced to the full conference Friday after consultations with other key nations.

"We welcome this as further progress toward an early agreement on the text," said British Ambassador Sir Michael Weston.

Attention now turns to India, which has threatened to block the accord.

The conference has been meeting in Geneva for more than two years to agree on a treaty to ban nuclear tests. Conference members have been charged with drawing up a treaty by consensus, which will then be signed formally in September by UN members in

New York. India, which has a history of tensions with neighbours China and Pakistan, is thought to have nuclear weapons, though it has always denied it. Israel and Pakistan are also believed to have nuclear capability. Some key negotiating nations say without signatures from all eight nuclear countries, the treaty is pointless.

India has said it will not sign the accord, and that only a commitment by the five declared nuclear powers to eliminate their arsenals will change its mind.

However, conference members have pressured India by placing its name on a list of countries that must sign the treaty before it can take effect.

That would mean India would sink the accord altogether by not signing.

India has said it would block the treaty in Geneva unless its name is removed from the list.

An Indian official close to the Geneva talks reiterated Wednesday that his country intends to block the treaty.

Dole for overturning citizenship guarantee of child born on US soil

SAN DIEGO, Aug 8: Declaring illegal immigration has reached "crisis proportions," Republican leaders called on Wednesday for a constitutional amendment to overturn a 128 year-old guarantee of citizenship of any child born on US soil, reports Reuters.

The Republican Party's platform committee, adopted a proposal that citizenship be denied to children born in the United States to parents who are not long term legal residents — a category covering undocumented aliens and some foreigners in the country legally as well.

Seeking to capitalise on public outrage over illegal immigration platform writers voted unanimously in favour of the plan, a direct challenge to a longstanding guarantee enshrined in the fourteenth

amendment to the constitution.

The proposal was part of a series of measures calling for beefed up restrictions and criminal penalties against illegal immigrants. Among the toughest proposals to deport immigrants, both legal and illegal, convicted of such crimes, as domestic violence, stalking child abuse, child neglect and child abandonment.

This sends the message that we're ready to strengthen our laws, said Florida representative Bill McCollum, a leading conservative voice on immigration policy.

If the plan is approved at the Republican national convention set to begin on Monday in San Diego it becomes part of the official manifesto nominee in waiting Bob Dole will carry into the campaign against President Bill Clinton.

Lankan jets, artillery pound LTTE posts

COLOMBO, Aug 8: Sri Lankan warplanes and artillery pounded Tamil rebel positions Thursday, trying to crack the guerrillas' fierce defence of their largest stronghold, military officials said, reports AP.

For three days, Tamil Tiger rebels have blocked the military's assault on Kilinochchi, one of the last towns still under rebel control, in a key battle of the 13-year civil war.

Rebel fighters in heavily fortified bunkers and dug into irrigation ditches have rained rockets and mortars on the armour and infantry columns, halting the advance about three kilometers (two miles) north of Kilinochchi.

Official reports of casualties usually are delayed by a day. By Wednesday, the army said 381 people had been killed in the offensive, including 64 soldiers. The rebels said they had lost 51 fighters, while claiming to have killed at least 100 soldiers and destroying six tanks.

Kilinochchi, which had a peacetime population of 50,000, controls the shell-gutted highway from the Sinhalese-dominated south to the Tamil-populated Jaffna Peninsula in the north.

The battle also is important for morale following recent setbacks by each side.

Last December, the army evicted the Tigers from their political and military headquarters in Jaffna City. Last month, the guerrillas routed nearly 1,400 soldiers in the east coast base of Mullaitivu.

"All attempts by the armed forces to advance further towards Kilinochchi have been foiled effectively," the rebels said in a statement from their London office on Wednesday.

Relief workers say more than 200,000 Tamil refugees who fled when the fighting began may be running short of food.

BRIEFLY

Israeli minister to meet Arafat:

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai is to meet Palestinian President Yasser Arafat late this month to discuss the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank town of Hebron, a television report in Jerusalem said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

The location of the August 18 meeting was not mentioned in the report on channel two television.

Most Israeli troops were to have withdrawn from Hebron in March under the accords establishing Palestinian autonomy on the West Bank but the pullout was delayed by former Prime Minister Shimon Peres after a wave of Islamic suicide bombings in the Jewish state.

Floods kill 26 in Spain: Floodwater, rocks and mud slides deluged a camping area in the Pyrenees mountains, killing at least 26 people and injuring many more, reports said, AP reports from Biescas.

Flooding and a series of mud avalanches, caused by two days of heavy rainfall during Spain's vacation season, also overturned cars on nearby roads, the EFE news agency said.

Parts of the demolished campground were strewn as far as one kilometre (half mile) from the site.

Japan begins food poisoning probe:

Japanese authorities yesterday began inspecting a type of cress considered the chief suspect in the country's worst outbreak of food poisoning in half a century, as farmers fretted over falling sales, AFP reports from Tokyo.

With headlines like "sprouting radish shock..." dominating daily newspapers, and supermarkets halting sales of the offending plant, Health and Welfare Minister Naoto Kan moved to prevent a consumer panic. Kan told parliament the farm suspected of distributing the contaminated cress had "suspended shipments" and packages of the popular garnish now sitting on store shelves do not pose any risk to consumers.

3 to die for flesh trade in China:

Three people convicted of tricking country girls into working in brothels in the boomtowns adjacent to Hong Kong have been sentenced to death in southwestern Sichuan province, AP reports from Beijing.

Bai Fafen, a young woman from Sichuan, was convicted of luring 10 girls from Guizhou, an impoverished inland province, with the promise of jobs in Guangdong, across the border from Hong Kong, the official newspaper Sichuan Daily reported. Instead of getting high paying jobs, six of the girls were sent to work in "beauty parlours" fronts for porn shops and brothels, said the report. It did not say what happened to the other four girls.

Govt, MNLF peace deal protested:

More than 10,000 demonstrators in Zamboanga staged a massive protest yesterday against an interim peace deal with Muslim rebels, while President Fidel Ramos again appealed for calm, AFP reports from Zamboanga.

The protesters in this mainly-Christian city rallied outside a hotel where senators were discussing the peace plan between the government and the Muslim insurgent Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).



King Hussein of Jordan (L) shakes hands with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat (R) upon his arrival to Aqaba airport Wednesday. Arafat is in Jordan to meet King Hussein to discuss the peace process and his last meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. — AFP/UNB photo

Off the Record

Does she have any secrets left?

LONDON: Does Fergie have any secrets left? That's the premise of a book deal signed by Allan Starkie, former business partner of John Bryan, the American who nibbled the royal toes, reports AP.

Publisher Michael O'Mara said Wednesday he will publish Starkie's book, "Fergie: Her Secret Life." The publication date and financial arrangements were not announced.

It wasn't clear what secrets the 36-year-old former wife of Prince Andrew has left. She was, after all, only wearing the bottom half of her swim suit when she was photographed canoodling with Bryan. Her financial problems have consumed volumes of newspaper.

She has also sold several photo and interview spreads to a sympathetic celebrity magazine.



Jacqueline handled it pretty well

NEW YORK: With his wedding day approaching, John F. Kennedy confessed to his bride-to-be about his womanising, but Jacqueline Bouvier "handled it pretty well," according to a new book, reports AP.

"He confessed everything to Jackie," former Sen. George Smathers tells author Edward Klein in "All Too Human: The Love Story of Jack and Jackie Kennedy."

"Women of that class and generation were raised to turn a blind eye to sexual peccadilloes."

The book, excerpts of which appear in the September issue of Vanity Fair magazine, also says that Jackie broke off an engagement to a Wall Street stock and bond salesman, John G. Husted Jr to marry Kennedy.

The book also says that Jackie's mother, Janet Auchincloss, plotted to stop her alcoholic ex-husband from walking her daughter down the aisle. Mrs.

Auchincloss sent a relative to get Jack Bouvier drunk before the ceremony, but Bouvier showed up at the church anyway. He was relegated to a seat in a corner.



AI slams repression on minorities in Myanmar

BANGKOK, Aug 8: Myanmar military continues to detain, torture and kill minority groups in spite of ceasefires it has signed with ethnic insurgents, Amnesty International reported Wednesday, reports AP.

At the root of the abuses is the government practice of removing Burmese — both majority Burmans and minority groups — from their villages and forcing them into unpaid labour, according to a 14-page report by the London-based human rights group.

The US State Department, the International Labour Organisation and others have strongly criticised the practice.

Myanmar government did not immediately comment on the report. In the past, it has defended forced labour as part of a strategy for creating employment.

The Amnesty report, based on interview with dozens of Burmese refugees in Thailand, comes on the eighth anniversary of a popular uprising against Burmese military rule.

On August 8, 1988, workers waged a general strike to protest authoritarian rule and economic deprivation. Virtually every town and city in the Southeast Asian nation of 38 million people erupted in a mass denunciation of the government.

Gen. Saw Maung seized power the following months and ordered troops to quell pro-democracy demonstrations throughout the country. By official count, 425 people were killed in two weeks.

The current military government has reached cease-fires with 15 of the ethnic groups. But abuses in minority areas, documented by Amnesty International since 1987, continue unabated, the organisation's report contends.