

Move to help children take exams

Lankan army, Tigers may hold ceasefire next month

COLOMBO, Aug 18: The Sri Lankan army and Tamil rebels are expected to hold a ceasefire next month to enable Tamil schoolchildren to take their school examinations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Sunday, reports Reuter.

It said the government had asked the ICRC to help conduct the national examinations for "A" level students on the northern mainland, where a three-week old battle near a rebel-held town has displaced more than 200,000 civilians from their homes.

"We will be discussing the logistics of the exams with the Defence Ministry soon," ICRC spokesman Marco Well told Reuters.

"We expect a ceasefire from September 2 to September 22 to allow the children to take their exams," he said. Under the proposed agreement the

ICRC would escort government school examiners to the northern Wanni mainland where hundreds of students were expected to do the tests. He said AP adds Navy patrol vessels destroyed a small Tamil rebel boat off Sri Lanka's northern coast, killing at least eight rebels, a military official said.

Eight other rebel boats in the area were also damaged in Saturday's skirmish off the coast of Vettikulam, about 300 kilometres (187 miles) north of the capital Colombo, said Maj. Tilak Dunuwila, a military spokesman.

There were no fatalities among the navy, but one of its boats was slightly damaged.

The guerrillas are fighting for a homeland in the north and east for minority Tamils, accusing the majority Sinhalese of discriminating against them.

"These orders should be considered the first serious step toward stopping the bloodshed," Pulikovsky said.

Fightings cast doubts on Chechnya ceasefire

Saturday after meeting with Maskhadov in southern Chechnya.

As he spoke, both sides were firing on each other with artillery, mortars and machine guns. Russian warplanes staged several air raids on Chechnya's capital, which the rebels overran on August 6.

Russian troops are surrounded at three spots in Grozny. Separatists control the rest of the city.

Civilians, caught once again in the crossfire of the war, have deserted the city by the tens of thousands.

Pulikovsky said he refused Maskhadov's request not to use aviation and artillery in Grozny. He also said a rebel attack on a military train near Grozny was repelled by Russian helicopter gunships Saturday.

Iissa Astamirov, the Chechen chief of staff in Grozny, said his fighters also repelled several

Russian attacks.

"We don't have any hope that the Russians will honor any ceasefire," he said. "Russia's policy is based on the principle of the fewer Chechens, the better."

The rebel command said five Russian armored vehicles were destroyed Saturday night in fighting according to Interfax.

AFP adds Some 10,000 people took part in a rally in northeast Chechnya on Saturday to voice their support for Russian presidential envoy Alexander Lebed's initiatives to end the hostilities in the republic, Interfax news agency reported.

Interfax, monitored by the BBC, said, the rally was attended by inhabitants of the republic's Naursky and Sherkovsky districts who included political officials and spiritual leaders.

Gujral Defends India's stand on N-test ban treaty

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 18: Visiting Indian Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral today defended his country's blocking of the nuclear test ban treaty, alleging it was drawn up in the five nuclear powers' interest, reports AFP.

Gujral, who arrived in Malaysia today for a three-day visit, said the purpose of the conference on disarmament in Geneva to discuss the treaty is defeated by those who want to sustain their monopoly of nuclear weapons power.

The draft text of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) "has been so framed that they (the nuclear powers) can go on making their weapons more sophisticated," Gujral was quoted by the official Bernama news agency as saying.

India derailed 31 months of talks last Wednesday by blocking agreement on a draft text that was to have been adopted Thursday by a plenary meeting of the UN conference on disarmament.

India rejected the draft, claiming it omits a commitment for the five nuclear powers — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — to scrap the estimated 21,000 nuclear weapons in their combined arsenals.

Opposition says Iraq launches attack on Shi'ite Muslims

NICOSIA, Cyprus, Aug 18: Iraqi army units have been attacking Shi'ite Muslim communities in the southern marsh lands as they search for army deserters and opponents of President Saddam Hussein, an Iraqi opposition group said Saturday, reports AP.

The army units have staged intermittent roundups and attacks since early July on civilian areas around Silin, a marsh area north of Basra, the main city in the south, the group said.

The marsh lands around the southwestern city of Nasiriyah have also come under attack, threatening the lives of civilians, the opposition group said.

The Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, based in Iran, said Iraqi security forces have been authorized to arrest and execute army deserters.

The group gave no casualty figures and its account could not be independently confirmed. But Iraqi forces have staged similar sweeps in the past against Shi'ite Muslim communities in the south, many of which are opposed to Saddam.

Outside Tripoli, the militants broke into the apartment of Fathia al-Zawariyah, a member of Gaddafi's female bodyguards. They killed Lt. Col. Mohammed Boushishah al-Gaddafi as well as al-Zawariyah, the newspaper said. There was apparently no relation between the officer and the Libyan leader.

The group did not say when that attack occurred.

Gaddafi has allowed little opposition to his government, but policies like allowing women to become his personal bodyguards have angered conservative Muslims.

The Islamic Martyrs Movement emerged earlier this year when it claimed responsibility for several attacks near Benghazi, including an assault on the Egyptian consulate which left two guards dead.

Bodos kill 8 border guards in Assam

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: Tribal guerrillas today killed eight border guards and a policeman in an ambush in the far-eastern Indian state of Assam, the United News of India (UNI) reported, says AFP.

The eight members of the paramilitary Border Security Force were slain in Nalbari district by an outlawed tribal group, the Bodo security force, the news agency said.

A policeman travelling with the border guards was also killed by the guerrillas, which the UNI said were armed with AK-47 rifles.

Hundreds of paramilitary troops have launched a massive hunt in the largely rural area to catch the attackers, who are fighting to carve out an independent homeland for Bodo tribes in Assam.

The report could not be immediately verified, but Egypt's state run Middle East News Agency reported Wednesday that police had arrested 10 officers in connection with plotting a coup.

Perot wins nomination for presidency

VALLEY FORGE (PA), Aug 18: Ross Perot, the Texas billionaire who founded the Reform Party, won its first contested nomination for the presidency on Saturday night, according to a report on CNN, reports Reuters.

Perot defeated former Colorado governor Richard Lamm 32.145 or 65.2 percent of the vote. Lamm had 34.8 percent and 17.121 votes.

The announcement of the results was delayed for several hours by what a party spokeswoman called the complexity of the process.

Perot was scheduled to give an acceptance speech today before about 2,000 party members in the second of a two stage convention that began Aug 11 in Long Beach, California. A party spokesman said that of the ballots cast, 88 percent voted by mail, eight percent by telephone and four percent on the Internet.



US First Lady Hillary Clinton (R) signs an autograph with the help of her special assistant Kely Craighead (L) who is loaded with gifts for the First Lady, Saturday during a campaign stop at the Idaho Falls Airport. — AFP/UNB photo

Riot against bread price-hike

Jordanian army imposes curfew on Karak

in Karak, some 1,000 protesters gathered and many threw stones at police, who responded with tear gas to disperse the crowds.

Allan said protesters set fire to two government buildings and a private bank shortly before army units in armored vehicles deployed in the city, 150 kilometers (90 miles) south of Amman.

A witness, speaking on condition of anonymity, said protesters had retreated from the streets and were on balconies and roofs throwing stones at soldiers.

In Maan, 100 kilometers (60 miles) further south, a witness said police patrols fired tear gas at 300 protesters chanting anti-government slogans. Calm later prevailed in the town, the witness added.

There were violent confrontations in the southern towns of Karak and Maan when police attempted to break up demonstrations. Both cities had similar protests Friday.

Junta reiterates legal action against Suu Kyi

which intensified in May with a government crackdown on Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy.

"One of her main criticisms of the government is that there is no rule of law in Myanmar with the military rulers wield



ing arbitrary power. The newspapers did not specify what laws Suu Kyi was alleged to be breaking.

Off the Record

Mummies' revenge

CAIRO: For 31 years, Nasy Iskander has been master of the mummies, presiding from his dusty office over Egypt's most tightly wrapped people. Now, it's the mummies' revenge. They're elbowing Iskander out of his office at the Egyptian Museum, taking over his space for an even bigger exhibit of the embalmed remains of Egypt's ancient pharaohs, queens and priestesses, reports AP.

The reason is that the mummy room, opened two years ago, quickly became one of the most popular in the vast museum, which has 160,000 ancient artifacts.

Up to 1,000 people a day pay the extra fee for the mummy room — 8 dollars for tourists and 1.50 dollars for Egyptians — providing a third of the museum's revenue.

"People are deeply curious about mummies, and that is one of the reasons they come," said Iskander, the director of preservation work.

Iskander's second-floor office is across from the first mummy room, with dim lights that softly glow on nine pharaohs and two queens.

Iskander sits at a dusty desk amid glass cases containing 16 brownish mummies thousands of years old. Only 12 will go on display this year; the others are too deteriorated.

He is glad to explain what's special about the "new" mummies. One is the Pharaoh Merneptah-Siptah, whose left foot is bent as if in agony. Siptah, who ruled from 1210 BC to 1204 BC was born with his left leg shorter than his right.

Then there's Maatkare, a royal priestess wholly wrapped in delicate linen. Next to her is a small bundle that scientists, first thought was her child. X-rays showed it was a baboon, probably her pet.

Experts on mummification praise the subdued atmosphere of the mummy room — no cameras, please. But the low-key look hasn't stopped visitors from emerging with eyes wide at seeing this odd bit of history survive.

"I could not imagine that after all this time, their hair would still be there," Bahraini tourist Zeineb Abu Hessein said.

After 2,300 yrs

KIEV: The skeletons of a Scythian tribal chief, his servant, and his decapitated horse were brought to Kiev on Friday 2,300 years after their deaths, reports Reuters.

Archaeologists uncovered the remains last month from an ancient burial cave 150 km (90 miles) south of Kiev. Gold and silver artifacts and ancient Greek pottery were also found.

The chief was found lying on a raised platform with a golden sword still in his hand and his servant next to him.

The horse and its head lay nearby — though to be a traditional burial custom. Tapestries were nailed to the cave's walls with wooden pegs.

This treasure will remain in Ukraine and we hope that we will be able to exhibit it all over the world, archaeologist Serhiy Skoryi told Reuter.

A nomadic and warlike people Scythians settled on the Steppes of Ukraine north of the Black Sea in the seventh century BC, living there until their kingdom was destroyed by the Sarmatians 400 years later.

BRIEFLY

Polls begin in Lebanon

yesterday in the Christian heartland of Mount Lebanon in the first of five rounds of parliamentary elections in Lebanon, Reuter reports from Lebanon.

Polling stations opened at 7:00 am (04:00 GMT). The Mount Lebanon elections will return 35 deputies to the 128-seat parliament. Voting in the other four regions will take place in the next four Sundays. The Mount Lebanon polls promise a hot battle between pro-government and opponents hoping to restore what they say is Lebanon's lost sovereignty.

44.1 kg heroin seized in Myanmar: Myanmar authorities have seized about 44.1 kilo grams (97 pounds) of heroin in eastern Shan state, state run radio Yangon said in a broadcast monitored here Saturday. AFP reports from Bangkok.

Two men were arrested and charged for drug trafficking after a group of military intelligence agents found more than one hundred blocks of heroin hidden inside the Toyota Sedan they were driving, the radio said. The agents acted on a tip-off and the seizure took place on August 6 at a road checkpoint near the town of Ho-Pong, about 500 kms (310 miles) northeast of Yangon, it said.

Russian Dy PM off to UAE:

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Ignatenko left Moscow yesterday for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to fetch seven Russian airmen who fled there after escaping from their captors in Afghanistan, ITAR-Tass news agency reported. AFP says from Bangkok.

Ignatenko said he would have talks with the authorities in the UAE before returning home to Moscow yesterday evening with the airmen, who had been held hostage for just over a year.

New Liberian govt to be sworn in: Foreign ministers of the Economic Community of West African States announced late Saturday a new interim Liberian government to be sworn in by the end of the month, AP reports from Abuja, Nigeria.

Foreign ministers of the 16 nations that provide peacekeeping soldiers for Liberia said after a two-day summit in the Nigerian political capital that the Liberian Council of State will now be headed by a former senator, Ruth Perry. The interim government will oversee preparations for elections now scheduled for May 30. It would hand over power to an elected administration by June 15.

Road mishap claims 7 in Mexico: A speeding car crossed the centre line and crashed into an oncoming truck outside the Mexican capital Saturday, killing seven people and injuring one, Federal Highway police said. AFP reports from Mexico City.

The single survivor was in intensive care in a nearby hospital, police said.

Secret grave found in Nicaragua: Human rights officials have found a clandestine grave with the bodies of 150 people killed during the civil war of the 1980s, a newspaper reported on Saturday, Reuter reports from Managua.

The head of Nicaragua's permanent Human Rights Commission, Luis Hernandez told La Prensa that the grave contained 150 of the more than 990 people who disappeared in Nicaragua during the 1980s. Most vanished during the eight-year civil war between the Sandinistas and US-backed right-wing guerrillas known as Contras or in the months following the July 1979 Sandinista Revolution.

Bobby Brown hospitalised:

Singer Bobby Brown got hospital treatment for minor leg and neck injuries after he crashed his wife's black Porsche into a street sign and some shrubs, AP reports from Hollywood.

No charges were filed against Brown and the cause of Saturday's accident was being investigated, police spokeswoman Stephanie Norris said. She said Brown lost control of the car on a residential street in this city just south of Fort Lauderdale.

Rebels kill 2 Christians in Egypt:

Islamic militants shot dead two Coptic Christians and injured three other people in a series of simultaneous raids on jewellers' shops in the southern Egyptian town of Tahta on Saturday, police said, AFP reports from Cairo.

10 killed in China bus mishap: A bus trying to overtake another vehicle at a bend on highway in south China hit another bus on the opposite lane, killing 10 passengers and injuring another 26, newspapers reported Sunday. AP reports from Hong Kong.

The collision occurred Friday when the bus, travelling from Haikou to Sanya in Hainan province, collided head on with another bus and ran over the protective rail along the side of the highway, the Beijing-backed Ta Kung Pao said.

It also forced another mini van off the road, it said. The paper said all casualties were local residents of Hainan and Chinese tourist.