

International

Army rounding up Tamil civilians

Lanka plans to ban LTTE

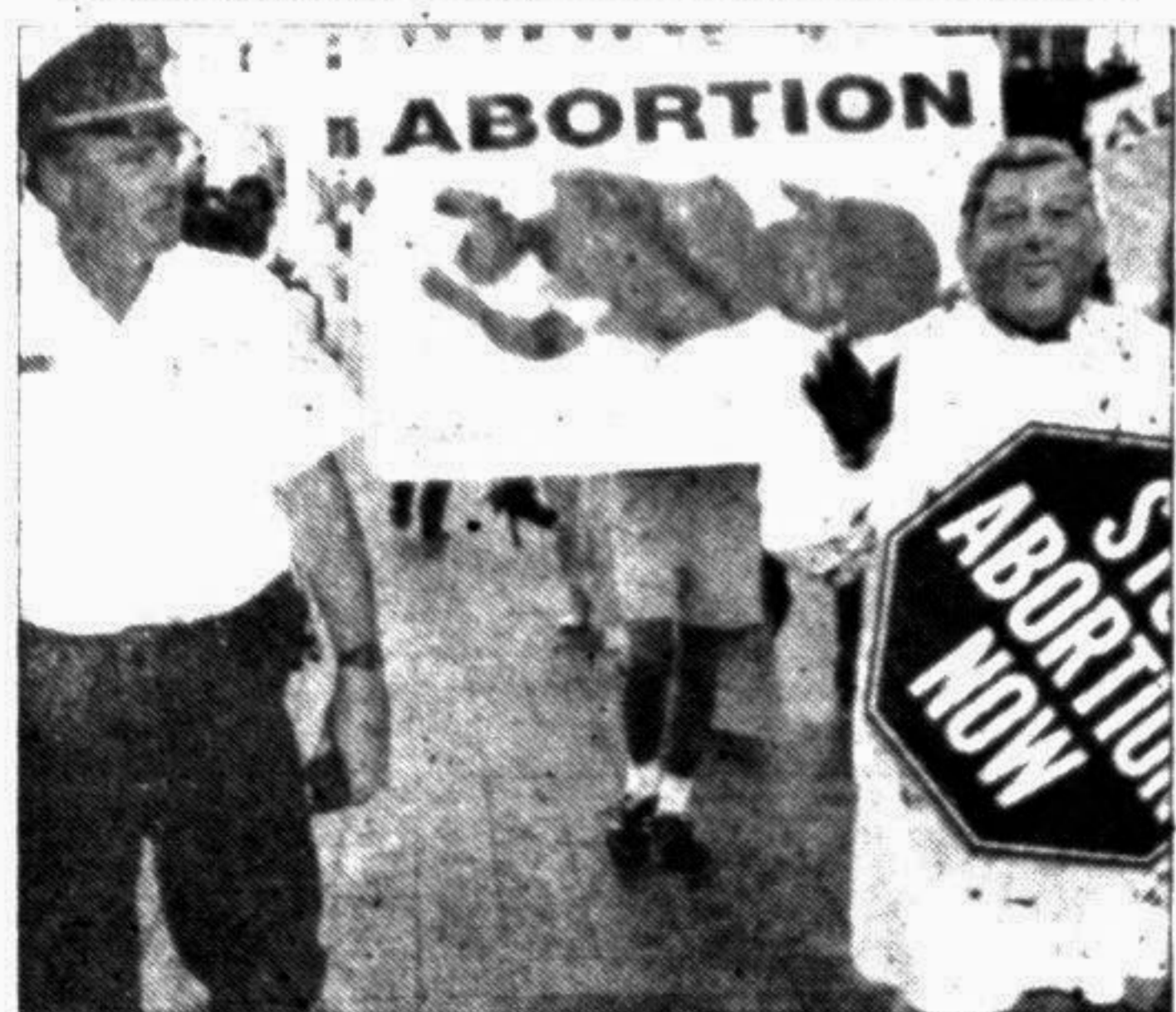
COLOMBO, Aug 25: The Sri Lankan government is considering a ban on the main Tamil rebel group that is waging a civil war in the country's north and east, newspapers and a government official said Sunday.

on condition of anonymity. The discussions to ban the LTTE coincided with a visit by counter-terrorism experts from the United States, who concluded a series of meetings in Colombo, the details of which were not made public.

An LTTE front group called the People's Front of Liberation Tigers was a registered as a political party in Sri Lanka in 1990. Banning the LTTE would only make it harder for the government to talk to the LTTE. It will delay the process of negotiation, said Jehan Perera, a newspaper columnist and political commentator.

from Sri Lankan Army repression, the LTTE said in a statement issued from its London office. For its part, the military here said that it was the Tigers who were forcing civilians to flee to India as government forces kept up pressure against the rebels.

BRIEFLY



A Chicago policeman looks at an abortion protester on Saturday on the Michigan Ave. bridge in Chicago, IL. The Christian Defence Coalition is planning to protest abortion clinics in the Chicago area during the Democratic National Convention which begins today.

Japan deports 4,069 immigrants

Japan deported 4,069 illegal immigrants following a nationwide crackdown from late May to early June, the Justice Ministry said yesterday. AFP reports from Tokyo.

Israeli FM to visit Cairo

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy has received an official invitation to visit Egypt and could travel to Cairo early next month, official sources said yesterday, AFP says from Jerusalem.

China executes 9 more criminals

China has executed nine men for stealing cars and cash in a two year crime spree across several countries, the Beijing Daily reported yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

Shanouk asks PM to pardon newsman

King Norodom Shanouk formally asked his two prime ministers Sunday to pardon an opposition newspaper editor serving a one-year jail sentence for calling them a pair of thieves.

Floods in Vietnam claim 200

Nearly 200 are confirmed dead and more than 700 are still unaccounted for following typhoons and floods in northern Vietnam in the past month, reports said yesterday.

2 German jets crash in Canada

Two German tornado jet fighters crashed about 130 kilometres (95 miles) west of Goose Bay Saturday during low-flight training exercises, the search and rescue centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia said.

Voting begins in North Lebanon

Voting began yesterday in north Lebanon in the second round of parliamentary elections with 580,000 voters eligible to choose 28 members of the 128-member parliament.

Noted Egyptian newsman dies

Ahmed Bahaa Eddin, the former editor of Egypt's most prestigious daily newspaper Al-Ahram, died Saturday after a long illness, the newspaper announced.

25 Iranians held from dance party

Twenty-five young Iranians have been arrested and sentenced to 10 lashes of the whip for attending a "depraved" dance party in Tehran, the newspaper Keyhan reported Saturday.

German space scientist dies

Wilhelm Angele, a German-trained engineer and scientist who helped develop the American space programme, died Thursday at age 91, AP reports from Richmond.

Plane crash kills 1 in US

The pilot of a small plane appeared to be struggling to avoid an office building and hotel just before the aircraft crashed in flames short of Seattle's busy airport, witnesses said.

PA shuts 3 East Jerusalem offices

JERUSALEM, Aug 25: Palestinian Authorities (PA) have shut three East Jerusalem offices which Israel had demanded be closed as a condition for pursuing the peace process.

7,000 feared stranded Kashmir blizzard death toll rises to 138

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 25: The death toll in Kashmir rose to 138 today as blizzards decimated a Hindu pilgrimage in the Himalayas, officials said, reports AFP.

Around 60,000 people including two women from Belgium and the Netherlands, reached safety following a massive land and air rescue operation.

Further reports, however, suggested as many as 7,000 people could still be stranded in the danger area.

Indian soldiers found 15 more bodies on the Himalayan peaks of Seshnag and Mahagunias, 3,380 metres (11,154 feet) above sea level today.

Most of the dead reportedly died from exposure as snow and heavy rains wrecked roads in the Kashmir valley.

Other bodies were found close to the Amarnath Cave, believed to be the home of the Hindu god of death Shiva. The shrine is visited by thousands of Hindus in August every year.

India's 'adult' TV channel to be launched in Sept

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: India's first 'adult' television channel is poised to be launched at the end of next month in a blaze of controversy, reports AFP.

"Plus 21", a restricted pay channel, promises a diet of crude jokes, adult songs and risqué serials. Its opponents, however, are promising determined opposition in this traditionally conservative country.

"We will have all kinds of adult programmes," said Suresh Kumar, Chief Executive Officer of Globe Internet Ltd which owns the new network.

"There will be no pornography, but yes, we will show nudity," he said.

Kumar, speaking from the northern city of Chandigarh, said the channel, due to start beaming four hours daily on India's Independence Day on August 15 before being delayed by organisational changes, added: "It will be a channel for the mentally matured people."

"Plus 21" has already announced its programmes for the first three months, and they include programmes which would never be screened on state-run television.

Doctors struggling to save Mother Teresa's life

CALCUTTA, Aug 25: Doctors were struggling early today to save the life of Mother Teresa, whose faltering heart showed little signs of improvement as she remained on a respirator in intensive care in a Calcutta hospital, reports Reuter.

A team of six doctors was keeping a round-the-clock vigil on the 85-year-old Roman Catholic Nun, who was awarded the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize for her missionary work to mitigate the suffering of the world's destitute and dying.

"Sunday will be crucial for her. She must respond to treatment," said a doctor on duty at the city's Woodlands Nursing Home.

Doctors said she was suffering from irregular cardiac beats and nagging fever caused by malaria. She was admitted to hospital last Tuesday with a high temperature and severe vomiting.

'Pakistan building missile factory with China's help'

WASHINGTON, Aug 25: Pakistan is building a factory to produce medium-range missiles using blueprints and equipment supplied by China, The Washington Post reported Sunday, reports AP.

Quoting unidentified US intelligence officials and a classified report, the newspaper said the factory is being erected in a suburb of the northern city of Rawalpindi.

It is expected in a year or two to be capable of producing most of the major components of a missile either similar or identical to the Chinese-designed M-11, the Post said.

Officials told the Post that the project raises the possibility of a major new arms-proliferation dispute with Beijing, perhaps leading to broad economic sanctions against both the Chinese and Pakistani governments.

The United States has twice imposed limited sanctions against China for selling M-11 missile launchers and finished missile components to Pakistan, but lifted them after China promised to stop such deliveries.

Washington recently settled a dispute with China over a sale to Pakistan of nuclear-related equipment and the Post quoted officials as saying the construction of the missile factory raised the possibility that broad economic sanctions eventually could be imposed on both countries.

The existence of the Pakistani factory had been known to US intelligence officials since last year when construction evidently began, the newspaper said.

Some US officials believed the factory would produce precise duplicates of the missile, the Post said.

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NATO force bans army movements into Bihac

SARAJEVO, Aug 25: The NATO-led peace force has banned Bosnian army helicopter flights and prohibited the movement of army troops and equipment into a tense northwest province, reports AP.

The force intercepted an eight-truck convoy Thursday night carrying about 200 newly trained recruits from central Bosnia into the northwest Bihac region.

Lid Col Max Marriner, a peace force spokesman, said Saturday the army had not tried to get the required permission from the peace force for the troop movements, he said.

On Friday four Bosnian military helicopters carried more than the number of passengers authorized by the peace force. They too, were traveling between Zenica and the Bihac region, Marriner said.

The transport bans will remain in effect until further notice, Marriner said. Tension remains in the Bihac region, where Muslim fought Muslim parallel with the Muslim-led army's war against Bosnian Serb rebels.

Intimidation of opposition political activists and attacks against them occur frequently. Occasionally, grenades are lobbed against the houses of opposition figures.

Alexander Ivancko, the UN spokesman, said Saturday that the local chief of police in Cazvin, in the Bihac region, had been fired.

In May, Haris Silajdzic, the former prime minister and now opposition candidate, was beaten during a rally in Cazvin. Investigators concluded that the beating was engineered by the ruling party, the Muslim Party for Democratic Action, and that local police were accomplice.

AFP adds, Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic appealed to his compatriots in Germany on Saturday to return home to help rebuild the war-shattered country.

Lankan PM slams minister for raising doubts about parentage of her only son

COLOMBO, Aug 25: Sri Lanka's matriarch Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike slammed a senior minister today for raising doubts about the parentage of her only son, Anura, who is an opposition legislator, reports AFP.

Bandaranaike, 80, warned Energy Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte, also a close relative of the Bandaranaiques, to in future "speak with a sense of responsibility" and not to defame the country's first family.

Ratwatte, who is also junior defence minister under President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the second daughter of Premier Bandaranaike, had said the Anura was someone else's child, accidentally given to the family.

"I am compelled to write to you in view of the shrill public statements made by you concerning my family which has distressed me greatly and caused me pain of mind," Bandaranaike said in a letter to her cousin Ratwatte today.

You should in future try to speak with a sense of responsibility without defaming members of my family and myself, the prime minister said in her letter, a copy of which was released to the press.

Bandaranaike said all her three children were born at home and there was no question of a mix-up at a hospital.

Ratwatte is loyal to President Kumaratunga, who won a succession battle over brother Anura. The president is a ferocious critic of Anura, who quit the family's Freedom Party to join the rival United National Party in 1993.

Their father, Solomon, was prime minister until he was assassinated in 1959 and their mother stepped into his shoes to become the world's first elected woman prime minister in 1960.

Anura Bandaranaike has declared he will file defamation charges against Ratwatte and his mother is expected to be a key witness.

Off the Record

Mummy behind series of deadly incidents

LIMA: Juanita the frozen Inca mummy has already been at the center of an international tiff. Now, some Andean shamans say she's behind a series of deadly incidents that have plagued Peru since she was discovered, reports AP.

The self-described shamans say they need to appease the mummy, known as the "Ice Princess," because she was unhappy with being disturbed from her resting place on Mount Ambato, in Peru's southern Andes.

Earlier this week, they held a healing ceremony in the city of Arequipa, 465 miles (750 kms) southeast of Lima, near where the mummy was found in October.

Among the incidents they say have plagued the area since then are the February 29 crash of a Peruvian commercial jet that killed the 123 people aboard and deaths of 35 people electrocuted last week when a high tension cable fell on a crowd celebrating the 456th anniversary of the city's founding.

Is the mummy cursed? The American archaeologist who found her says no.

Johan Reinhard said in an interview published in the El Sol newspaper that Juanita was a gift of the "apus," a Quechua term for the spirits of the mountains that are part of traditional Andean beliefs.

"I didn't dig to find her. She was in plain sight and was not discovered thanks to any human effort, but thanks to another 'apu,' the volcano Sabancaya, which heated the area," Reinhard said.

Reinhard said others have suggested "the mummy was happy to have been found, because she was sad at being exposed to the sun."

Foreign Office welcomes ceasefire UK offers to host talks between Kurdish parties

LONDON, Aug 25: Britain offered on Saturday to host peace talks in London between two Kurdish factions in northern Iraq, reports AP.

The Foreign Office welcomed a ceasefire that ended six days of fighting and said it supported efforts by the United States to bring about reconciliation between the two sides.

On Friday in Washington, the State Department said the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan had agreed to a truce.

State Department Spokesman Glyn Davies said KDP leader Massoud Barzani and the PUK's Jalal Talabani pledged to meet with US Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau in September to seek reconciliation.

The British Foreign Office statement said, "We hope that the talks in September announced by the US will lead to a durable peace agreement between the two Kurdish parties. We stand ready to host talks in London, if this will help reach such an agreement."

Some 3.5 million Kurds live in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, where allied forces set up a "safe haven" in 1991 following a failed rebellion against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's rule.

The uprising followed Iraq's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War that evicted Iraqi troops from Kuwait, ending a seven month occupation that sparked an international confrontation.

However, after the common threat from the Iraqi army was eliminated, the two Iraqi Kurdish groups turned against each in a struggle for supremacy.

Last week's fighting shattered a year-old truce brokered by Washington.

PA shuts 3 East Jerusalem offices

JERUSALEM, Aug 25: Palestinian Authorities (PA) have shut three East Jerusalem offices which Israel had demanded be closed as a condition for pursuing the peace process.

A Palestinian official speaking on condition of anonymity said the offices — one dealing with Youth and Sports, a Geography Institute and a Statistics Bureau — had all halted operations and some of their activities were being transferred to West Bank areas under Palestinian control.

He said the decision was taken by the leadership of the Palestinian authority.

Russian, Chechen soldiers jointly patrolling Grozny

GROZNY, Russia, Aug 25: After 20 months of war, Russian and Chechen soldiers jointly patrolled this devastated city, and Chechen fighters even brought food and water to their Russian counterparts, reports AP.

The patrols Saturday were the first step in implementing the truce signed two days earlier. On Sunday, fighters from both sides were supposed to start pulling out of Grozny.

Also Sunday, Russian security advisor Alexander Lebed prepared to meet again with the top Chechen military commander, Aslan Maskhadov, to hammer out a political settlement to end the conflict.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said Lebed would offer the Chechens a referendum on their rebel republic's political status in five years. The Chechens are fighting for independence from Russia, something Moscow says it will never allow.

Lebed, who came back to Chechnya on Saturday with Boris Yeltsin's endorsement of his peace efforts, held talks with Russian officers, then sat down with Maskhadov in Noviy Ataki, 15 miles (24 kilometres) south of Grozny.

"We must stop this barbarism because there can be no victors in this war," Maskhadov said. "We must help Gen. Lebed end this war."

Outside a Russian base a few miles (kilometres) away, the first joint patrols were formed. The Russian soldiers stood facing a ragtag band of the tough Chechen guerrillas who had run them out of Grozny. Then, in what could be a prelude to peace, the former foes melted into a single unit. Later, another unit jointly patrolled Grozny.

This war has cost us a great deal and now in our hands we have the chance to end this war or to continue it, to kill people or not. We must step back from war," said Russian Major Gen Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov.

In addition to the pullback scheduled Sunday for both sides, the Russians were to withdraw from several southern regions next week and eventually, from Chechnya altogether.

While Russian military reported occasional shooting, including an attack on a military convoy Saturday in Grozny, the capital was relatively quiet Saturday.

Chechen fighters, who overran the city August 6 in some of the worst fighting of the war, were even helping bring food and water to some of the beleaguered Russian units they had surrounded inside Grozny. They also had their Russian prisoners digging up Russian dead from the battle so the bodies could be returned home.

"I'm not 100 per cent convinced this agreement will work," said a top Chechen commander in the capital, Isa Astamirov. "But if we work together, maybe it can. It's in the hands of God."

Every previous agreement in Chechnya has crumbled amid mutual distrust and the latest one still looks shaky. The Chechens insist they'll settle for nothing less than the full independence Russia has fought so hard against.

But it appeared that Lebed instead would try to persuade the Chechens to put aside their demands for independence, at least for a few years.

The ITAR Tass news agency said Chechnomyrdin saying Chechnya's political status "should be decided by the people" in a referendum in five years, after the situation has stabilised.

But the prime minister insisted that Chechnya should remain part of Russia. "That's for sure," he said. "But when and with what status should be decided later, not now."

Chechnya declared independence in 1991. In December 1994, Yeltsin sent in troops to crush the separatist movement, igniting a protracted, bloody conflict that had claimed at least 30,000 lives, mostly non-combatants.

The president recently put Lebed, an ambitious general-turned politician, in charge of resolving the conflict.

Mutiny in ship: 12 seaman killed in South Pacific

SEOUL, Aug 25: Twelve seamen were killed, including seven South Koreans, in an apparent mutiny on board a Honduran-registered fishing boat in the South Pacific, a South Korean maritime police spokesman said today, reports Reuter.

He said a Japanese vessel on Saturday picked up a distress signal from the boat drifting without fuel after an uprising by ethnic Korean crew members from China who had complained of hard work.

A Japanese maritime police vessel reached the stricken trawler at 5:00 am (2000 GMT Saturday) and was investigating the incident.