

Tigers overrun police post : 27 killed

COLOMBO, Aug 29: Tamil rebels overran a police post and attacked a village in eastern Sri Lanka early Thursday. At least 27 people, including 20 policemen, were killed in the fighting, reports AP.

At least seven civilians were among the dead in the pre-dawn attack on the ethnic Sinhalese village of Kudapokuna, about 190 kilometres (115 miles) east of the capital, Colombo.

The military feared the death toll could rise, saying reconnaissance patrols may find more bodies in the surrounding jungles.

The rebels overwhelmed the nearby police post with grenades and machine gun fire. They set the building ablaze before moving on to the village, a military spokesman said.

Residents of the small farming community fled into the surrounding jungles.

Rebel casualties were not immediately known. At least 13 civilians were wounded in the attack and taken to a nearby hospital.

Separatist Tamil rebels frequently attack ethnic Sinhalese villages in areas bordering the northeast, where the rebels are fighting for a homeland for minority Tamils.

Tamil separatist guerrillas say they face widespread discrimination from Sri Lanka's majority Sinhalese population. More than 45,000 people have been killed since fighting started in 1983.

Thursday's attack was the largest rebel assault in more than a month, with fighting having died down after thousands died on both sides when the guerrillas overran a northern military base.

The army retaliated to the early attack by laying siege to the Kilinochchi, the biggest rebel-held town.

Reuters says: Tamil Tiger rebels overran an isolated police post in Sri Lanka's north-east early today, killing 24 policemen, defence officials said.

A large group of LTTE guerrillas stormed the Kudapokuna police post just

Democrats renominate Clinton

CHICAGO, Aug 29: Confident Democrats have nominated President Clinton for a second term, embracing Al Gore's portrait of their youthful ticket as America's "bridge to the future."

The vice president said Republican challenger Bob Dole was a good man with bad ideas, reports AP.

"An America not just better off, but better," was Gore's description of Clinton's "first-term legacy in his speech before the vote Wednesday night."

"And our strength at home has led to greater respect abroad," Gore said. "Nuclear missiles no longer targeted at our cities. Democracy replacing tyranny in Haiti. Peace replacing war in Bosnia. Leadership toward reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Middle East."

Govt, MNLF begin final talks to end 26 yrs of war

JAKARTA, Aug 29: The Philippine government and Muslim rebels began a final round of talks Thursday for a pact to end 26 years of fighting that has killed 150,000 people, reports AP.

The two sides say they are prepared to sign a peace treaty Monday after negotiating the final details of how rebel fighters will be integrated into the Philippine military.

"Already, the draft of the final agreement is on the table ready for consideration and adoption,"

Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said at the opening session of the fourth round of talks.

The Moro National Liberation Front has agreed to accept more autonomy for Muslim-dominated regions in the south of the Philippines, Asia's only predominantly Roman Catholic nation.

About 5,750 rebel fighters are to join the armed forces, while 1,750 others will join the Regional Police Force, according to Indonesian diplomat Hasan Wirayuda, chairman of the peace talks.

Australia hails China's policy on Tibet

CANBERRA, Aug 29: Australia has said it is unfair to condemn China's record on Tibet as "entirely wrong", adding Beijing has made a great effort to improve health and education in the Himalayan region, reports Reuters.

Australian Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer, who is visiting China, made the remark in a radio interview aired in Australia today.

"It is not wise or fair to ignore the fact that there has, for example, been a great deal of effort injected into improving the health and education of Tibetans by the initiative of Beijing," Fischer told Australian Broadcasting Corp from Shanghai on Wednesday.

Fischer has been cautioned by Beijing officials about a visit to Australia next month by the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. China regards the Dalai Lama as the leader of a pro-independence cause in Tibet.

Fischer also criticised the position of one of the Dalai Lama's most prominent supporters, Hollywood actor Richard Gere, who is a follower of Tibetan Buddhist teachings.

Gowda distances himself from Bal Thackeray

NEW DELHI, Aug 29: Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda has distanced himself from a controversial Hindu militant leader following anger over a meeting between the two, a newspaper said today, reports AP.

Deve Gowda, under attack for a private head-to-head with Bombay political leader Bal Thackeray, told the Hindu Nationalist Daily newspaper: "Bal Thackeray and I believe in different ideologies."

"My commitment to the ideals of democracy and secularism is abiding. Nobody can make me depart from the principles I believe in."

Thackeray, whose fundamentalist Shiv Sena Party rules Bombay, has been blamed for helping instigate the razing of a mosque four years ago which led to communal riots.

Women group for cancelling Miss World contest

NEW DELHI, Aug 29: A Indian women's group has called for the cancelling of the Miss World contest which is due to be held in Bangalore in November, the Hindu Daily paper reported today, says AP.

The All India Democratic Women's Association called on organisers Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Ltd (ACBL) to shelve the event the Hindu Daily newspaper said.

Association general secretary Brinda Karat said the concept was used by big business to promote beauty products while reducing women to mere measurement of body.

The competition is due to be held in Bangalore in November after ACBL signed a seven million dollar contract to stage the event for the first time.

Miss World Jersey Global Co started the contest in 1951.

International

US Congressman says Zahir Shah's return to power will bring peace

LAHORE, Pakistan, Aug 29: Visiting US Congressman Dana Rohrabacher Wednesday proposed the return to power in Afghanistan of former King Zahir Shah, saying this would quickly bring peace to the war-torn country, reports AP.

"Peace will be restored in Afghanistan within 90 days under the administration of former King Zahir Shah," the official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) quoted him as saying.

The congressman told the news agency after a meeting with Pakistani Foreign Minister Sardar Asef Ahmed Ali that the Afghan people would welcome the former king, who has been living in Rome since his exile in 1973.

Rohrabacher said he would next travel to Rome to brief Zahir Shah about his talks with Pakistani and Afghan

leaders. He said the combatants in Afghanistan "are ready to sit together and accept the former king as the new ruler of the country."

The congressman said Pakistan had a "very significant" role to play for restoration of peace in Afghanistan. The government of Pakistan "is very anxious to see peace and stability in the neighbouring country as it would prove a milestone toward a 'revolutionary' change in the region, he said."

Earlier, Rohrabacher met in Islamabad with Pakistani President Farooq Ahmed, who underlined to him that the US could play a key part in resolving the Afghan conflict.

"The US can play an important role for an equitable solution of the Afghan problem and early return of peace in the war-

ravaged country," Leghari said. An official statement quoted Leghari as saying peace would also "immensely benefit" US businessmen and investors, as large development projects like oil and gas pipelines and rail and road links between Central Asia and the rest of the world via Afghanistan would become possible.

He deplored that Afghanistan disappeared completely from American and Western television screens after the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989.

Rohrabacher said he hoped that the US would play its role for a just solution in line with the wishes of the Afghan people.

AP adds: After more than three years the strategic Salang Highway that links northern Afghanistan to the beleaguered capital of Kabul opened Thursday.

'Netanyahu's policies may lead to new war in ME'

ABU DHABI, Aug 29: Senior PLO official Faruq Kaddumi on Wednesday likened Israel's right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler and warned his policies could lead to a new war in the Middle East, reports AP.

"The (Netanyahu) is like Hitler in his expansionist policy and his Nazi, racist views," the head of the PLO's political department told AFP during a stopover in Abu Dhabi.

"This man symbolises the highest degree of arrogance, extremism and fanaticism. His success in the elections meant the success of radicalism and the parties which advocate undermining the basis of peace in the region."

Kaddumi was reacting to a decision by the new Israeli government's decision to build 1,800 more homes in an ultra-orthodox Jewish settlement in

the West Bank, the first such expansion of settlements since 1992.

The policies of Netanyahu's government, which ousted the Labour Party in May elections, could lead to a new war in the Middle East unless the United States presses him to stick to the peace accords, he said.

"There is no alternative for the Palestinian people but to resume resistance against Israel in all its forms. This is an arrogant enemy which knows only the language of force and resistance," said Kaddumi.

"Good intentions are useless with this enemy which has seized Arab land and imposed occupation," said Kaddumi, a hardliner who rejects the autonomy accords struck by the PLO and Israel's ousted Labour government.

"We call on the international community to impose an eco-

nomie and political siege on Israel," he said.

"We also urge the United States, which has launched the peace initiative for the Middle East, to either put pressure and deter Israel or annul its initiative," he said.

Kaddumi said Netanyahu's policies were clearer than those of ousted Labour Prime Minister Shimon Peres, although they were "two faces of the same coin."

"The Labour government was speaking a fine language and making a lot of promises but without actions," he said. "Netanyahu is very clear in his policies... to usurp the land."

Reuters adds: Palestinians began a four-hour strike in the West Bank and Gaza today.

Answering President Yasser Arafat's call for a protest against Israel's plans to expand Jewish settlements.

Off the Record



Diana, Princess of Wales, wearing her diamond and sapphire engagement and wedding ring, leaves the studios of the English National Ballet, in London, following a lunch on Wednesday. One of the world's most glamorous marriages ended Wednesday as the Prince and Princess of Wales, living apart for four years, went their legally separate ways. — AFP/UNB photo

Pantyhose question for Hillary

CHICAGO: First, President Clinton got the boxers-or-briefs question, reports AP.

Now, Hillary Rodham Clinton has gotten a pantyhose question.

Judy Markey and Kathy O'Malley, hosts of the "Kathy and Judy" radio show in Chicago, asked Mrs. Clinton during an interview Wednesday to settle a debate between them: Should underpants be worn under or over pantyhose?

"I would have to give that question a lot more serious thought," Mrs. Clinton replied — an artful dodge her husband might have used two years ago.

"Usually briefs," the president responded then when a 17-year-old girl — utilising a clever softener "the world is dying to know" — asked him on the cable rock TV channel MTV if he wore boxers or briefs.

World's biggest food fight

BUNOL, Spain: It's probably the world's biggest food fight, reports AP.

In less than an hour Wednesday, some 20,000 people turned 132 tons of tomatoes into slop, coating the main plaza of Bunol with the blood-red remains of nearly a million vegetables.

The annual Tomatina, or Tomato Festival, began a half-century ago and has been growing ever since. It now draws people from across Spain, and has lately begun to attract foreigners as well.

On Wednesday, the ritual began at 11 am, when men on trucks doused the crowd gathered in Bunol's main plaza with water hoses. Townspeople covered their windows and balconies with huge plastic sheets.

A fever gripped the crowd — mostly young men — jammed shoulder-to-shoulder in the narrow plaza. They began ripping off each other's T-shirts, flinging the shreds into the air.

"Tomato! Tomato!" they chanted, jumping in unison. Just past noon, the tomatoes came. Five truckloads of them.

Sixteen thousand dollars worth of them. One hundred and thirty-two tons of them.

Nine hundred and twenty-four thousand of them.

Workers on the trucks heaved armloads into the crowd below. Then, as the workers clung to ropes to keep from sliding into the plaza, the trucks dumped their entire loads.

Asian leaders welcome Chun, Roh's convictions

SEOUL, Aug 29: The treason convictions this week of two former South Korean presidents have resounded across Asia, where growing economies are swelling the middle-class ranks who yearn for more democracy, reports AP.

The events belied a popular Asian notion that bad governments will be forgiven their sins if they help bring their people prosperity.

Some of South Korea's most stunning economic growth came during regimes of the two presidents in the 1980s, as did its transition to democracy. And as it turned out, the new, more democratic system turned around to bite them.

Disidents hoped the convictions would persuade their own governments to be less autocratic.

In Myanmar, where the military overthrew a 1990 election

most of them civilians in the

Grozny area. Tens of thousands of residents remain away from the city, likely with relatives in Chechen villages. Others, fearing for their lives — but not enough to leave — subsist in dank basements where the words "People Live Here" are written in chalk on the door as a desperate plea to Russian soldiers to hold their fire.

Remarkably, many of these survivors are old and frail, including many ethnic Russians. They, too, have nowhere to go. Ceasefires bring them not back into the city but back into the daylight.

"Do you know?" one elderly Russian woman asked hopefully Wednesday, approaching a reporter in the street during the sixth straight day of calm since last week's truce. "Is the war over?"

In other neighbour hoods across the battered city, newly returned residents were sure it wasn't. But they were back anyway.



Women activists of Pakistan Muslim League (PML) chant slogans against Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto during an anti-government rally in Karachi Wednesday. The rally was organised by the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) which include 15 political and religious parties. The COP has kicked off a massive country wide campaign for the removal of ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government. — AFP/UNB photo

'Abacha plunges Nigeria into chaos'

GENEVA, Aug 29: The military regime of General Sani Abacha is running roughshod over the rights of Nigeria's citizens in a "reign of terror," a report said Wednesday, says AP.

Rule of law in Nigeria has broken down, plunging the country into chaos, the International Commission of Jurists said in its report, an independent organisation that defends the legal and judicial systems of the world.

The commission urged the world to step up isolation of the Nigerian regime by freezing the foreign assets of the West African country's government and its collaborators.

"The international community must demonstrate to the Nigerian military regime that it cannot continue to defy its calls without being reprimanded," said the commission's secretary-general, Adama Dieng.

The yearlong study, which comprises 238 pages, said the

Nigerian legal and judicial systems had been totally undermined by government decrees, often backdated so that past actions can become illegal after the event.

Military tribunals, which do not provide the right to a fair trial, had usurped ordinary courts and press freedoms had been severely curbed, it said.

Police were empowered to detain suspects for up to three months without trial for acting against state security or "contributing to the economic adversity of the nation." This effectively gave them "carte blanche" to detain all opponents of the government at will, the commission said.

Over 300 activists, journalists, politicians and labour leaders are in detention, the study said.

Moshod Abiola, believed to have won June 1993 presidential elections annulled by the government, was jailed when he

marked the election anniversary by declaring himself president.

He has been held without trial for more than two years.

Political activist and playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others were detained without charge for more than eight months. A special military tribunal tried and sentenced the activists to death amid allegations of an unfair trial and international outcry.

The report also cited "widespread" killings and systematic torture by the Nigerian police force.

Torture methods include beating with sticks and iron bars, wires and cables; and sticking sharp objects into suspects' genitals, it said.

The study noted "strange circumstances" surrounding a wave of attacks and killings of well-known government critics.

It cited four such cases since 1995, including Abiola's wife,

Returning Grozny residents vow to stay

the edge of her bombed-out building, its entire front facade ripped open in a rocket attack. 28-year-old newlywed Maleika Israillova shoved frantically through the ankle-deep ruins of her eighth-floor apartment Tuesday.

A few minutes later she collapsed in tears, having dug in vain for four days for her life's savings — more than 5 million rubles (1,000 dollars), tucked in a bag and hidden on a balcony that no longer existed. She had found the bag, but it was empty.

"This is not war. It's the extermination of a people," her brother Lechi said angrily, his sister speechless and weeping.

Their friends and neighbours comforted the woman — and renewed their pledges never to let the Russians push them out.

"What a beautiful city this used to be," said Maleika Nazhuyeva, 35, surveying the

wreckage of what two years ago was a serene, tree-lined city of 400,000. "Now look at it."

"Never mind, we'll rebuild it," replied Maya Khazhuyeva, 34. "We have strong spirit."

Indeed, both Grozny and the Chechen people have shown an astonishing will to survive through 20 months of pounding by the Russian army.

Even as corpses are still being discovered in back alleys and mounds of debris left from this month's fierce fighting, the central market has sprung back to life and residents are trying to go about business as usual.

In a city still without electricity or running water, well-groomed women in long flowery dresses and scarves carried shopping bags of goods through the streets Wednesday. A man in a stiff track suit walked home with a loaf of bread in each hand, while people reached into near-empty pock-

ets to help out a wrinkled old woman sitting on a piece of cardboard, her shaking hand outstretched.

Several men squatted on roofs replacing clay shingles that were smashed by Russian artillery while they and their families were away.

Sultan Kurumov, a 58-year-old dentist, was less lucky. He showed the result of what he described sardonically as "humanitarian aid" — a Russian mortar round that smashed through the wall of his family's tidy one-story brick home and knocked down chunks of the ceiling.

Why do they keep returning to this hell?

"We have no money, nowhere else to go," he said with a shrug. Besides, he added firmly: "It's our land."

The war between Moscow and the separatist rebels has claimed more than 30,000 lives,

BRIEFLY

Mediators talk US plan for Burundi: A

US envoy and mediators seeking to end Burundi's civil war coordinated efforts Wednesday in Rome, officials said, but there was no sign the warring factions were involved yet, AP reports from Rome.

On the table was a proposed US deal that would allow official recognition for Burundi's military leader who seized power in a coup last month, according to a spokesman for the Roman Catholic community St Egidio, one of the mediators. Howard Wolpe, the special US envoy for Burundi, and former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere held talks on how to stop ethnic killings and to reinstate Burundi's National Assembly, deposed during the coup according to Charles Sanga, an aide to Nyerere.

Zimbabwe to sack 7000 civil servants:

Zimbabwean Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare Florence Chitaura said in Harare Wednesday night that about 7,000 civil servants will be given notices of dismissal for failing to comply to orders to return to work last Friday, Xinhua reports from Harare.

Chitaura said in a statement that heads of ministries, in consultation with the Public Service Commission, spent the whole of Tuesday serving notices of dismissal to the civil servants who had been identified as having taken part in the recent strike.

China appoints 5 new ministers:

China's central government has appointed five new vice ministers, four of whom are replacing three outgoing officials, the official Xinhua news agency reported early Thursday, AFP reports from Beijing.

The State Council appointed Zhang Wule vice minister of the State Economic and Trade Commission, it said. Chen Shuneng and Wang Xinfaung were named vice ministers of the chemical industry, replacing Tan Zhuzhou, and Liu Zhijun became vice minister of railways, replacing Guo Lin. Liu Lijun was also appointed vice minister of posts and telecommunications, replacing Liu Pingyuan, Xinhua said.

Sweets sicken 10 in Bombay:

Sweets distributed during a religious holiday sickened at least 10 children in the western city of Bombay, a local news agency reported Thursday, AP reports from New Delhi.

The children were admitted to a private hospital in India's financial capital late Wednesday night after they complained of vomiting. United News of India news agency reported quoting unnamed police officials. The children ate milk pudding during a Hindu festival, it said. Details of the incident were not immediately known.



US actor Robert De Niro (L) hands over the "Leone D'Oro" (Golden Lion) award to Dustin Hoffman at the 53rd international film festival of Venice Wednesday. Hoffman received the award for his lifetime achievements. De Niro and Hoffman arrived in Venice to launch their film "Sleepers" produced by Barry Levinson, being shown out of contest to officially open the festival. — AFP/UNB photo