

BRIEFLY

Li Peng arrives in Mozambique: Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng arrived in Maputo, Wednesday for a two-day working visit to Mozambique. AFP reports from Maputo.

He was met by Mozambican leader Joaquim Chissano on his second leg of a six-nation African tour. Li was scheduled to meet Chissano later in the day for official talks. The two leaders were expected to sign a number of bilateral agreements in yet unspecified fields.

Explosion claims 12 in China: An explosion and fire at a chemical factory's sewage treatment plant in the central China city of Chongqing killed 12 people, a plant official said yesterday. Reuter reports from Shanghai.

Six people were hurt by the explosion on May 4 in the Changshu chemical plant, the official said.

China tornado death toll now 9: The death toll from a tornado which ripped through southern China's Hainan province has risen to nine and four people still missing were presumed dead, a local official said yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

Seven bodies had been found after 48 hours of searches in Wuchang harbour, a Beipo town government official told AFP by telephone. Two children were initially reported killed and 70 injured by the tornado, which overturned some 60 anchored fishing boats in just six minutes early Tuesday morning. Most of those killed were children and elderly people, the official added. Fishing families in many areas of coastal China live and sleep on their boats.

Fire claims 10 in Pakistan: At least 10 people were killed yesterday in a fire started after a fuel tank from a Pakistan Air Force plane broke off and fell into a residential area in Karachi, ambulance workers said quoting eyewitnesses.

US ME envoy arrives in Israel: President Bill Clinton's Middle East peacemaker arrived in Israel on Wednesday to launch a new bid to revive talks paralysed by nearly two months of crisis, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

As Dennis Ross began talks with Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu, neither Israeli or Palestinian officials held out much hope that he would be able to conjure up a breakthrough in the immediate future. Ross, in his second shuttle mission within a month, met Netanyahu in closed-door talks in Jerusalem, Netanyahu aide Shahi Bazak said. Bazak declined comment on the substance of the meeting.

Kiet for backing expatriates: Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet has called on state bodies to give more support to the two million Vietnamese living abroad, a report here said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

More than 300,000 Viet Kieu, as Vietnamese expatriates are known, visited Vietnam last year. Official remittances from Viet Kieu, which dropped dramatically at the end of last year when the government imposed a 15 per cent remittance tax, have not recovered despite the abolition of the tax in March.

Yeltsin may meet Maskhadov: Russian President Boris Yeltsin may meet his Chechen counterpart Aslam Maskhadov in Moscow next week for talks aimed at concluding a peace treaty, a Kremlin spokesman said Wednesday. AFP reports from Moscow.

Sergei Yastzhembsky said Yeltsin's meeting with Maskhadov "will be possible in the first days after the holiday marking Russia's World War II victory over Nazi Germany, the centrepiece of which will be a military parade in Moscow Friday. This year the holiday will stretch into a long weekend."

Circus tiger kills trainer in US: As a circus audience of 200 children and their families watched in horror, a 400-pound (180-kilo) Bengal tiger pounced on its trainer, killing the man and dragging him around the ring by the neck. AP reports from Carrolltown, Pennsylvania.

The tiger, one of three in the ring, attacked 50-year-old Wayne Franzen a few seconds after Wednesday night's performance began, authorities said. The animal attacked when Franzen, the owner of Franzen Bros. Circus, turned his back.

Sectarian violence worsens in Punjab Pak troops arriving at Sunni stronghold

JHANG, Pakistan, May 8: Pakistani troops have begun arriving in Jhang, the bastion of the extremist Sunni group Sepah-i-Sahaba, in the heart of Punjab, where sectarian violence has worsened in the approach to the Shiite Moharram holy festival.

One battalion of some 800 men has arrived, but it is on reserve and will not be used unless we are overstretched," a police official told AFP in this region of 1.9 million people, some 200 kilometres (125 miles) southeast of Lahore.

"We have already put in a round 20 roadblocks which are controlling traffic and we are checking for weapons being brought into the town," he said, speaking above the racket of buses and cars as well as wagons pulled by donkeys, horses and camels in the town.

Jhang is the base of Sepah-i-Sahaba (SSP), an extremist Sunni group founded in 1985 by Haq Nawaz. He was assassinated in 1994, and his portrait now adorns walls across the town.

The current head of the SSP, Azim Tariq, was arrested Tuesday in Lahore, he was elected the deputy for Jhang at Punjab's provincial assembly in February, during the general elections, winning nearly 28,000

votes. His movement wants the Shi'ites declared "non-Muslim", according to police the SSP and a similar Shi'ite organisation, Sepah-i-Mohamed, are buried in a bloody war across Punjab, Pakistan's most populated province, on Tuesday the fighting claimed the life of a senior police officer.

"We want an Islamic state in Pakistan and all around the world," Sahabada Mohammed Qadri, Punjab Secretary General of the SSP, told the news agency in his headquarters in Jhang.

"We fully support the Taliban in Afghanistan, they are true Muslims and are working for an Islamic state," he added.

"Wherever Muslims are fighting, they are supported by us," he said.

The SSP, which follows the deobandi tradition, named after a school of Islamic thought based in New Delhi, India, has several religious schools across Pakistan where students aged between 10 and 25 form and important reservoir of militants.

The SSP's secretary general said 450 of these activists have been killed in the country since the movement was created. Although reticent on the funding of his party, he denied accusa-

tions the SSP was funded by Saudi Arabia.

In the centre of the town, close to the central bazaar, there is a refuge for the Shi'ite minority here, some 30 per cent of the town's population, who live along a maze of narrow and contorted streets.

"We are not afraid of the SSP, we are well-organised," said officials from the group.

If they want to fight, we are OK," added a young Shi'ite militant from the Tehrik-i-Jafria party, which has close links with the Sepah-i-Mohamed.

According to police statistics since 1990 some 96 people have been killed and 90 injured in sectarian attacks in this town. But for the head of police, Raza Tahir, the violence which started in Jhang is now "propagated all around the province."

He says however the "problem could be resolved within six months" if the police were given a "free hand" as they were in Karachi, the major city in the south of the country.

There, in 1995 and 1996, the authorities succeeded in curbing religious violence, although more than 2,000 died in a year and a half, including 200 police and rangers.

"That's the price you pay," the head of police in Jahan said.

'UF, Congress now maintaining coordination'

NEW DELHI, May 8: Indian Congress (I) Party, which extends crucial parliamentary support to the minority government, Wednesday said the administration would be "stable," reports AFP.

Congress chief Sitaram Kesri told the party's parliamentary wing at a meeting here the leaders of the United Front and Congress were "discussing issues" and "maintaining coordination" now.

The Congress (I) plunged the country into a political crisis a month ago after it withdrew support to the United Front government and staked a claim to form a government on its own, saying there was a "communication gap" between the two.

Kesri later backtracked and declared the Congress (I) would support a new United Front government if the then prime minister H D Deve Gowda stepped down.

An identical coalition government took power on April 20 with Inder Kumar Gujral as Premier.

Priyanka's fake husband jailed

NEW DELHI, May 8: A man has been sentenced to five years in jail for fabricating documents to show he was married to the daughter of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, newspapers reported Thursday, reports AP.

Rama Krishna Gaud, a member of the Congress Party, was found guilty on Monday by a local magistrate, but handed down the jail term on Wednesday, the reports said.

Three weeks before Priyanka Gandhi was to marry Robert Vadra in February, Gaud filed a lawsuit in a court, saying he was already married to her.

Magistrate Prem Kumar said "Gaud has abused the process of the court to insult womanhood. To curb this tendency of resorting to false cases, a severe and deterrent punishment is called for."

Although the Gandhi family holds no office of power, they are immensely influential in the Congress Party, which Rajiv Gandhi headed until his assassination in 1991. Before that, his mother, Indira Gandhi, and his grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, led Congress governments since independence in 1947.

Priyanka has resisted attempts to induct her into politics. Her mother, Sonia, is considered a power centre in the Congress.



A student dressed as The Grim Reaper stands by a coffin representing public education burns outside Australian Prime Minister John Howard's office in Sydney on Thursday. Thousands of students around the country marched to protest predicted cuts to education spending in the federal budget on May 13. — AFP/UNB photo

Salman Rushdie gets his ancestral home in India

New Delhi, May 8: Indian-born celebrity writer Salman Rushdie has finally overcome the three-year legal wrangle over his ancestral home in a pretty hill town in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh, according to India Abroad News Service.

The title deed for Anis Villa, named after Rushdie's father Maulvi Anis Ahmed Rushdie and located in Solan, about 40 kilometres from the state capital of Shimla, has been handed back to Rushdie by a local official. The Indian Express newspaper reported.

The estate is presently the official residence of a state judicial officer. It was occupied by Rushdie's father till 1987 and even housed the State Education Department for some years.

Rushdie filed his claim over the two-storey house in the state High Court in 1992 when a

top local official said there was no claimant for the property. The controversial writer contested the claim on the basis of a registered gift deed for the house.

Some local writers had asked the state to convert the house into an international writers' home while the legal battle was on.

In the course of the case, Rushdie's mother and sister, also claimants to the house, had said it should be restored to the author as he possessed the gift deed.

The state government still has possession of the house, though some changes have apparently been made in the title deed. Asked why the government still controlled Rushdie's house, a senior official declined to comment saying that was to be worked out by the state government.

NY City taking steps to help legal immigrants gain US citizenship

NEW YORK, May 8: With the US Congress refusing to relax the newly-passed welfare law that severely restricts social benefits to legal immigrants, the New York City is taking some unusual steps to help its immigrant residents, reports UNB.

Mayor Rudolf Giuliani is setting up a new city agency to help legal immigrants become US citizens.

According to a report published in Tuesday's New York Times, Mayor Giuliani would propose spending US 12 million dollars over the next two years to set up six offices around the city to help immigrants at every stage of the naturalisation process.

These offices will help the immigrants in filling out forms to prepare for citizenship tests to negotiate complicated bureaucracy in the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS). Offices will be set up in

New York's four main boroughs: Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens.

The programme will assist over 60,000 immigrants gain US citizenship by 1998.

This move by a Republican mayor has come as a pleasant surprise to many advocates of immigrants' rights. The American Civil Liberties Union, which has recently set up a special Immigrants' Rights Project to campaign on behalf of the immigrants, praised the mayor. A spokesman for the union pointed out that the move indicated how flawed the federal policies were.

The welfare law, enacted last year, excludes many legal immigrants, including the elderly and disabled, from special benefits such as food stamps which can be used as money for buying food and other essential goods. Over 1.2 million of New York's 7.3 million residents are legal immigrants.

The law will make 150,000 such legal immigrants ineligible for the federally-funded food stamps and disability benefits. Mayor Giuliani was among the first to question the validity of the new law. Immigrants, who are not citizens but are legal residents in the US, are subject to all local and federal taxes.

"If people are allowed into this country legally, and they are expected to pay taxes at the same level as everyone else, they should be treated the same way as everybody else," Giuliani was quoted by the New York Times as saying. His initiative, the mayor said, was "a matter of fairness."

While the mayor's initiative brought a sense of hope in the minds of immigrants, recent crackdown by the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) against immigrants has many people, including Bangladeshis, panicked.

Ukraine drops opposition to NATO plan to appease Russia

KIEV, Ukraine, May 8: Ukraine has decided to drop its opposition to a NATO plan to appease Russia by allowing it to keep higher numbers of military forces than allowed under a current treaty. NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana and Ukrainian officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Ukraine will agree to a change in the Conventional Force in Europe Treaty permitting Russia to delay conventional forces cuts in some geographical regions until 1999 and to refrain altogether from planned cuts in other regions, Solana said.

There are enough guarantees that (Ukraine) will ratify it" by a May 15 deadline, Solana said.

Ukraine is one of a number of former Soviet republics that still host Russian military facilities. As part of a possible agreement on NATO expansion, Russia may be allowed to keep higher levels of conventional

forces active both in Russia and in neighbouring countries.

Ukraine's opposition to modifying the so-called "rank limitations" has been seen as an obstacle to NATO's plans for bilateral security agreements with both Ukraine and Russia.

Gujral, Sharif to meet during SAARC summit

ISLAMABAD, May 8: The Prime Ministers of bitter rivals Pakistan and India will meet on Monday during the South Asian summit in the Maldives in an effort to boost the newly-opened rapprochement between the two countries, reports AFP.

The meeting between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Inder Kumar Gujral will be the first formal session between heads of the two governments in eight years.



Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo (R) displays a local newspaper's front page to hundreds of well-wishers gathered in the main Plaza of Tlaxcala, Mexico, Wednesday as US President Bill Clinton (C) and First Lady Hillary Clinton applaud. President Clinton is concluding his two-day official visit to Mexico. — AFP/UNB photo

Truth Commission may call Winnie to testify

CAPE TOWN, May 8: South Africa's "Truth Commission" probe into apartheid-era crimes said on Wednesday it would probably call President Nelson Mandela's ex-wife Winnie to testify about two missing children, reports Reuter.

A member of the commission, Yasmin Sooka, told reporters it was "more than likely" that the commission would subpoena Mandela's divorced wife, now known as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, to give evidence in camera.

A decision would be taken "possibly in the next two weeks or so" on whether to call Winnie, a parliamentarian and head of the ruling party's Women's League.

Sooka said the possibility of summoning Madikizela-Mandela arose after the parents of two children who went missing in the black township of Soweto in the 1980s asked the commission to try to find out what happened to them.

At the time Winnie lived in Soweto surrounded by the "Mandela United Football Club", a group of young bodyguards who Soweto residents accused of waging a reign of terror.

The leader of the club was jailed for murdering one boy, Stompie Sepele, in 1989. Madikizela-Mandela herself was convicted of having kidnapped the boy and received a fine.

Lankan govt forced to review proposed coal power project

Sugeeswara Senadhira writes from Colombo

The Sri Lankan government has been forced to review a proposed coal power project near the capital following massive protests by environmentalists and people living close to the site.

The Ministry of Power and Energy has appointed a committee to study the environmental aspects of the Kalpitiya project once again.

The decision was taken after an incident late last month when police resorted to shooting to control protesters, who staged a huge demonstration at the Kalpitiya site, 120 kms north of Colombo. One person was killed and three others were injured in the shooting.

Initially, the government had selected Trincomalee on the eastern coast for the 300 mega watt power station, but the venue was later shifted to Kalpitiya on the western coast on the advice of the Central Environmental Authority.

Besides, the government's tourism master plan has marked Trincomalee with a larger stretch of beach for development as a major resort and a coal power project is the last thing tourists want to see on the eastern coast, want.

But there was more opposition in store. The people of Kalpitiya, which has a popula-

tion of 47,000, were up in arms against their town being selected as the site with prominent local leaders leading the protests.

"The coal plant area is about 600 acres and a large number of villagers will be displaced," said Father Leo Pius of the Talawala church near Kalpitiya. "The land is very fertile and all vegetable cultivators in the area will lose their jobs. Even if they are relocated, they may not be able to grow vegetables in those areas," he said.

A spokesman for the Fishermen Association in the area, Mr J J Perra, warned that the proposed project would be a threat to fish and other sea life in the area's waters and many fishermen could well lose their livelihood.

But Mr D C Wijerathne, Additional Manager of the Central Electricity Board (CEB), said most of the land selected as the project site was just a jungle of scrub. "There is a little cultivation in the periphery," he admitted. "However we will do our best to minimise relocation of the villagers."

"We will obtain environmental impact assessment before the (Kalpitiya) project is launched," the CEB official said. "Pollutants in the air emissions including coal dust will be minimised because the plant

will be using desalinated sea water and not ground water," Mr Wijerathne said.

He pointed out that coal power was the most economical way to meet the country's power requirements in the future. "Coal power has to come," he added.

As Sri Lanka's power demand increases by 10 per cent every year, the CEB proposes to set up a series of coal and diesel power stations during the next three years.

Until two years ago the country heavily depended on hydro power but after two consecutive monsoon failures in the last two years, there was a nationwide blackout for nearly two months, adversely affecting business and industry. That was when the CEB decided to build coal and diesel power plants swiftly.

Hydro power generation, which accounted for 83 per cent of the country's total electricity production in 1994, is expected to drop to about 60 per cent this year.

A Japanese-funded feasibility study on an effective shift to thermal and diesel power, is currently being carried out by the Swiss company Elecrowatt and is expected to be completed in a few months. — India Abroad News Service

Maoist rebels gaining influence in rural Nepal

Deepak Gajurel writes from Kathmandu

Maoist rebels' hold over Nepal's politics appears to be growing stronger as their call to boycott local body elections in western and central parts of the country has deterred candidatures across six districts.

Rebels of the underground Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) have created what analysts are calling a "no election situation" in 40 village bodies across the districts of Rolpa, Rukum, Jajarkot, Gorkha, Salyan and Bajura for the May 17 election.

Maoists have threatened villagers to "boycott the local elections or face the consequences." The "consequences" have been demonstrated with candidates being kidnapped by suspected Maoists, according to a police report, which added that 10 political workers have been attacked by Maoist insurgents.

Chief District Officer of Jajarkot Dinesh Thapalia said people were clearly not coming forward for the elections due to fear of the Maoists. According to a newspaper report, Maoist insurgents are distributing pamphlets demanding that people who have managed to file their nominations "vacate the seats."

More than 100 people, including civilians and policemen, have lost their lives in

clashes between police and Maoist rebels since February 1996, when the "movement" was launched.

The Maoists' "people's war" has begun to show up even in the capital this time. Their calls for the boycott of local elections are written in public places across Kathmandu as well.

Mobutu will back to Kinshasa today

MEXICO CITY, May 8: Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko will end his short visit to Gabon and return to Kinshasa Friday, a White House spokesman traveling with US President Bill Clinton said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Mobutu's trip to Libreville, where he was to attend a regional summit, had fueled speculation that he was leaving Kinshasa for good.

"His aides have indicated that he's expected to remain in Gabon only until Friday, when he is to return to Zaire," White House spokesman Michael McCurry said.

Triple-drug therapy most effective for treating AIDS

NEW DELHI, May 8: A triple-drug therapy is the most effective for treating Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), according to latest international research findings, reports PTL.

A combination of three drugs — zidovudine which inhibit the viral enzyme protease, and zidovudine and lamivudine which inhibit enzyme reverse transcriptase — virtually cleared all the virus initially found in samples from patients.

The patients experienced a virtual clearance of the AIDS causing Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV) from their lymph tissues as well, a team of scientists led by Winston Cavert of the University of Minnesota Medical School in the United States reported in the latest issue of the American Science journal.

The researchers studied the impact of the triple therapy on the level of HIV in the lymph tissues of 34 previously untreated HIV-positive adults. Lowering the amount of HIV circulating in the blood helps but successful treatment must also eradicate HIV from the lymphoid tissue where HIV is produced and stored.

Six months of triple-drug therapy controlled active replication of the virus and cleared 99.9 per cent of virus from lymph tissues of the report in Science says. — India Abroad News Service