

BRIEFLY

US, India to sign treaty: The United States and India signed Wednesday a new extradition treaty that makes it easier to bring modern-day terrorists to justice. AP reports from Washington.

The document replaces a 1931 extradition treaty between the United States and the United Kingdom, which once colonised India. Salim Sherwani, India's minister of state for foreign affairs, and Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, signed the treaty agreement. In a joint communique announcing the new treaty, the parties expressed "their determination to redouble efforts to eradicate the scourge of terrorism and to use the treaty as an instrument to that end."

Floods claim 29 in India: Twenty-nine people were swept away by swollen rivers in the western Indian state of Gujarat, raising the death toll caused by monsoon floods in the region to 87, a newspaper reported yesterday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

The latest victims belonged to three extended families and were drowned late Tuesday in the Sabramati river, the Hindustan Times said, only one body could be recovered. Most of the victims since the outbreak of the monsoon earlier this month have been drowned.

Albright cancels Cambodia trip: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright decided Wednesday to cancel a planned two-day visit to Cambodia due to security concerns, her spokesman said. AFP reports from Phnom Penh on Friday to press leaders there the make progress in solidifying peace and to encourage them to hold elections on schedule next year. Albright was scheduled to arrive in the Cambodian capital between June 17 and 19. The Cambodian co-premiers raised concerns about the safety of Washington's top diplomat and her entourage.

Air crash leaves 2 dead in Spain: Two passengers of a tourist aircraft were killed Wednesday when their plane crashed into a building at Villalba de Adaja. The accident occurred soon after the plane had taken off from Valladolid on a flight to Madrid. The crash caused a big fire in the building but none of the occupants was injured, according to rescue workers.

Mild quake shakes Japan: A moderate earthquake shook southwestern Japan Thursday, an aftershock of a stronger quake that hit the same area the previous day. There were no reports of serious damage or injuries. AP reports from Tokyo.

The Central Meteorological Agency said the quake, with a preliminary magnitude of 4.2, struck at 11.45 am (0245 GMT), centered 10 kilometres (6 miles) underground near Masuda, about 770 kilometres (480 miles) west of Tokyo. On Wednesday, the area felt a stronger tremor of 5.9 magnitude.

116 prisoners pardoned in Peru: Peru's President Alberto Fujimori on Wednesday pardoned 116 people imprisoned on charges of terrorism because they were convicted on insufficient evidence. AP reports from Lima.

He also eased the harsh living conditions facing prisoners who are convicted or awaiting trial and allowed them more visits from family members, according to a government decree published in the state newspaper EL Peruano. The pardon was extended to prisoners "convicted of terrorism or treason based on insufficient evidence that allowed the commission to reasonably presume that they had no connection" to guerrilla groups, the decree said. Those pardoned included 94 men and 22 women from prisons across Peru.

Chernomyrdin arrives in China: Russian Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin arrived in China yesterday reports for a two-day visit, aimed at boosting trade ties between the two giant neighbours. AFP reports from Beijing.

Chernomyrdin flew in to the southern economic zone of Shenzhen bordering Hong Kong — and was scheduled to fly on to Beijing later in the day. The highlight of the visit will be the signing on Friday, with his Chinese counterpart Li Peng, of a framework agreement on trade and economic cooperation.

Delhi urged to allow HR team to Kashmir: The leader of a British parliamentary human rights group Wednesday urged New Delhi to allow international organisations to inspect the situation in Kashmir. AFP reports from Islamabad.

Currently on a visit in Islamabad, Lord Eric Avebury told news persons that India should open the doors for human rights organisations to visit Kashmir and assess the situation first hand.

He said the Indian government had not responded to repeated requests by his own group for permission to visit Kashmir.

Kuki rebels kill 8 in Manipur: Tribal militants massacred eight members of a rival tribe in northeastern India before the Indian Army intervened and shot four of the killers, newspapers said Thursday. AFP reports from New Delhi.

Kuki militants raided a village 50 kilometres (31 miles) from Imphal, capital of Manipur state, late Tuesday and gunned down eight members of Paite community.

Nine others were injured in the attack, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

East Timor rebel leader held: The Indonesian military said yesterday it has arrested senior East Timor rebel leader David Alex while military sources in Dili said he died from gunshot wounds. AFP reports from Dili.

"It is true, he has been arrested," the head of the information section of the East Timor military command, Captain Agus told AFP, declining further comment.

A military source here, who declined to be identified, said yesterday that Alex, the second in command at the Armed Pro-independence Frettilin Movement, died late Wednesday night from gunshot wounds he suffered in a shootout with soldier which led to his arrest.

40 pc support HK's merger to China: Fewer than half of Hong Kong's people support merger with China, and a third favour independence, according to opinion poll results yesterday. Reuter reports from Hong Kong.

Some 40 per cent believed Hong Kong should join China, while 35 per cent would like independence and 19 per cent would have preferred Hong Kong to stay a British colony, combined May-June polls in the South China Morning Post newspaper showed, six per cent expressed no opinion.

Britain is handing Hong Kong back to China at midnight next Monday after 156 years of colonial rule.

Telecom sat placed into orbit: Western Europe's 96th arian rocket blasted off from French Guiana late on Wednesday and placed into orbit a communications satellite for the 141 member-nation Intelsat Organisation. Reuter reports from Every, France.

The Ariane-4 rocket lifted off at 8.45 pm local French Guiana time (2345 GMT). Reporters at the corporate headquarters of Ariane Space Company near Paris watched the launch on video screens.

Twenty minutes after take off, space officials said the Intelsat 802 satellite separated from the rocket. The 3.4 ton satellite will provide telecommunications services to the Indian Ocean region. It was built by US aerospace giant Lockheed Martin.

Hashimoto apologizes to WW-II Dutch victims

THE HAGUE, June 26: Turning a new page in Japan's relations with Europe, Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on Wednesday issued a personal apology to Dutch victims of the Japanese in World War II, and laid a wreath at a war memorial here, reports AFP.

The Japanese premier, accompanied by Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok, bowed low and placed the wreath of white carnations at the monument erected in 1988 to the 25,000 Dutch prisoners who are south east Asia during the course of the war.

Several dozen Dutch war veterans and survivors Wednesday demonstrated against Hashimoto's presence in the Dutch capital.

Thousands of ageing survivors of the Japanese camps are still demanding that Tokyo pay its "debt of honour" by reimbursing them for their suffering.

"Japan has not offered us any compensation for our suffering," Nellie Xipp, who was interned at the age of seven in the camp at Aek Paminke in Sumatra.

"They stole everything we had and all I have had back to date is 300 guilders (around 150 dollars at today's prices) from the Dutch government in 1950," she said.

Japan has so far refused financial compensation saying that the issue was dealt with post-war intergovernmental settlement.

Taliban push out Uzbek opposition from Badghis

KABUL, June 26: The Taliban militia, who control most of Afghanistan, have pushed ethnic Uzbek opposition out of the western province of Badghis, they announced today, reports AFP.

"The Mujahadeen of the Islamic army captured Ghormach district and are advancing on Faryab," declared the state-run radio Shariat.

The militant Muslims started the attack on Wednesday morning from frontlines at Bala Morghab and marched north to Ghormach, a small town close to the border of Faryab province.

Radio Shariat reported 75 enemy fighters were captured and a further 21 dead bodies were left on the battlefield. No independent confirmation of the Taliban victory was available.

A spokesman for the northern opposition alliance contacted by telephone said he "had no information" about the al-

leged fall of Badghis.

The highground of the Tirbandi Turkistan mountain range — which overlooks Faryab's capital Maimana — was also reported to be now in the hands of the Taliban.

Anti-Taliban forces in western Afghanistan are under the command of Uzbek general Abdul Malik, who last may defected to the Islamic militants only to revolt again in a dispute over power-sharing.

The loss of Badghis will be a serious blow to the morale of the opposition alliance, which still faces a military threat from a Taliban-supported local uprising in Kunduz and Baghlan provinces.

Leading opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood has not yet launched an offensive against turn-coat subordinates in Kunduz who are backed by roving elements of a Taliban expeditionary force still free in the north.

This force had set out from

Kabul and crossed the Hindu Kush on the way to the northern capital Mazar-i-Sharif, when would-be ally Malik turned foe, and these Taliban took refuge in Baghlan city.

Part of this force, led by Taliban Minister of Culture and Information Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi, now supports defected opposition commander Arif Khan and others in Kunduz city, 75 kilometres (46 miles) north of Baghlan.

Arif Khan was a follower of ex-president Burhanuddin Rabbani, who after being ousted from Kabul in September 1996, retreated to Takhar provincial capital Taloqan 72 kilometres (45 miles) east of Kunduz city.

Masood, who is Rabbani's key military commander, must quickly suppress the Kunduz uprising or face the potential risk of more pro-Taliban mutinies in their heartland, analysts noted.



People belonging to Kansi tribe hold placards during a protest rally condemning the arrest of Mir Aimal Kansi, in the southwestern Baluchistan province, Tuesday. Hundreds of people shouted anti-US slogans and criticised the Pakistani government's assistance in the arrest and extradition of Kansi to the United States to face trial for the killing of two CIA agents in 1993. — AFP/UNB photo

Troops regain lost ground following LTTE attack

COLOMBO, June 26: Sri Lankan troops, badly bruised in a daring attack by Tamil Tiger separatists in which more than 200 soldiers and rebels died, were busy patching their defences and regaining lost ground on Thursday, military officials said, reports Reuter.

Military officials in the north said troops had patched a breach caused in the attack late on Tuesday and the main column of operation "jaya sikuru", or "sure of victory", which is aimed at opening a key northern highway, had linked up with the rear.

"The column linked up yesterday (Wednesday)," a Defence Ministry spokesman said on Thursday.

He said the situation in the area where the rebel attack occurred was under control and troops were consolidating their positions.

More than 1,000 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels, who are fighting for an independent homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east, attacked the army's artillery and mortar positions near Periyamadur, north of the government-held town of Vavuniya late on Tuesday.

Vavuniya lies some 220 km (135 miles) north of the capital Colombo.

Military officials said the rebels had punched a hole between half of one kilometre (quarter to half a mile) wide in the military's defence line.

The Defence Ministry has said more than 200 soldiers and rebels were killed in the attack, which lasted five hours.

It said in a statement on Wednesday that four officers and 60 soldiers were killed and 68 were wounded in the attack. The statement quoted ground troops as saying that 150 rebels

died in the battle and a large number were wounded.

But the clandestine Voice of Tiger radio, monitored in Vavuniya, on Thursday put the rebel death toll at 85, mostly women fighters.

The rebels withdrew just before daybreak before troops could ask for air support to hit the enemy, military officials said.

Diplomats said the rebels were well placed to carry out such surprise attacks on the troops since the military was moving along a narrow strip, with the separatists controlling either side of the main highway.

This was the second rebel attack in two weeks on the troops of operation jaya sikuru, who resumed their offensive through the brush jungles of the Wanni region on Monday to open a highway from Vavuniya to Jaffna Peninsula, further 100 km (60 miles) north.



Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara addresses the opening session speech of the foreign ministers of eight Arab nations meeting in the seaside Syrian town of Lattakia Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Filipino Muslim rebels hold 60 bus passengers hostage

COTABATO, Philippines, June 26: Muslim rebels blocked a highway in the southern Philippines Thursday and took about 60 bus passengers hostage, the military said, reports AP.

Soldiers attacked the 150 Moro Islamic Liberation Front guerrillas in a rescue effort in Maguindanao province, the military's Southern Command said.

The command did not immediately release information on casualties during the gunbattle that followed.

The military pursued the rebels who took the hostages from the two buses with them in a running battle to the town of Kabacan in nearby North Cotabato province, the com-

mand said. Capt Noel Detoyato, spokesman of the army's 6th Infantry Division, said the rebel action may have been in retaliation for a military attack against a rebel camp near the boundary of North Cotabato and Maguindanao province.

Once in Kabacan, 910 kilometres (570 miles) south of Manila, the rebels again blocked another highway and fought pursuing troops. Gunfire could still be heard around noon, radio station DXMS said.

Police and soldiers turned away other vehicles approaching the highway and some escaped passengers ran to escape the fighting, the radio station reported. Hundreds of commuters

planning to travel to North Cotabato from Davao City, about 100 kilometres (65 miles) east of Kabacan were stranded because bus companies stopped using the highway.

The Southern Command said at least 43 rebels and two soldiers have been killed in sporadic clashes since June 17, when government troops were sent to rescue 43 government survivors held hostage by the rebels in Sultan Sabarongis in Maguindanao.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front leaders have threatened to pull out of peace talks if the military tries to overrun a major rebel camp, Camp Rajamunda, in Pikit, North Cotabato, which was shelled by the military this week.

Mahatma Gandhi to get his own website on Internet

BOMBAY, June 26: India's independence campaigner Mahatma Gandhi is to get his own website on the Internet, a relative told AFP today.

Tushar Gandhi, a 37-year-old Bombay-based printer and a great grandson of Gandhi, said the website would be set up next month.

"Gandhi's philosophy, details of his life, his writings and his participation in India's freedom struggle will be available in cyber space," he said.

There are a few scattered pages on the Internet on Gandhi, but nothing that will be as comprehensive as we are planning.

Would Mahatma Gandhi, whose creed of non-violent protest led to the end of British rule in India, have approved of logging in to the Internet? Probably not.

He advocated a simple life style, a basic diet of fruit and nuts and Indian self-sufficiency based on basic industries.

His one concession to high technology came in the shape of a spinning wheel, which he used to spin his own clothes and linoleum.

Algeria forms new cabinet

ALGIERS, Algeria, June 26: Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia has named his first post-election Cabinet, maintaining the regime's leadership in the main positions but granting Islamist moderates seven posts, the government said late Wednesday, reports AP.

President Liamine Zeroual, a retired general, holds on to the defense portfolio in the 40-member Cabinet following the June 5 parliamentary election, the first during a 5-year-old Muslim insurgency.

Ahmed Attaf remains foreign minister, Mohamed Adami justice minister, Mustapha Benmansour interior minister, Abdelkrim Harchaoui finance minister and Youssef Yousfi energy and mines minister, the government said in a statement.

Most of the positions are held by Zeroual's National Democratic Rally (RND), which took 156 of the lower parliament's 380 seats in the June 5 balloting.

Artillery duels continue in Albania: 3 killed

TIRANA, June 26: Artillery duels were reported Wednesday night in the southern Albanian town of Vlore while in the nearby town of Fier, three people were killed in a car explosion believed to be linked to elections due this weekend, reports AP.

Residents of Vlore said the sound of gunfire was coming from all over the town where rival armed groups issued a warning earlier Wednesday that they were about to open hostilities.

"We can even hear salvos of Katyusha rockets," residents said.

In Vlore police were not answering the telephone on Wednesday night.

Meanwhile in Fier a few kilometres (miles) to the north, three people were killed and one was injured Wednesday night when the car in which they were riding blew up in the town centre. Inter Independent news agency reported, quoting local residents.

Russians slow to announce Mir accident

MOSCOW, June 26: It took a NASA announcement and prompting by journalists to make Russian space officials acknowledge Wednesday's collision between the Mir orbiting station and a docking cargo ship, reports AP.

But it still was a marked contrast to Soviet days, when the Kremlin would sometimes report its space disasters days later, if at all.

Officials at the Russian Mission Control Centre were eventually forthcoming if difficult to reach, after the Mir accident. Unlike their American counterparts, the Russians have no large media relations operation and were stretched to their limits by response to the accident.

Initial reports carried by the national ITAR-Tass news agency were brief, consisting only of a few formal lines. Later reports by Russian news agencies remained sketchy.

Phone calls to Mission Control went unanswered for hours, or were met by busy signals. No public relations experts appeared to be on duty, and no news conferences were called as of Wednesday night.

'Tension prevailing in ME for Israeli policies'

HARARE, June 26: Tension prevailing in the Middle East is the result of the provocative policies of the Israeli government, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said Palestinian Ambassador to Zimbabwe Ali Halimeh, reports Xinhua.

Ali Halimeh said in a statement yesterday that the Israeli administration was responsible for the collapse of the negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the government of Israel.

Iraq offers cooperation to new UNSCOM chief

NEW YORK, June 26: Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz on Wednesday offered "full cooperation" to the designated new UN chief arms inspector responsible for dismantling Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, reports AFP.

Richard Butler, Australia's ambassador to the United Nations, and Aziz met at the Iraqi ambassador's residence here. Butler is to replace UN Special Commission chief (UNSCOM) Rolf Ekeus next Tuesday.

Butler told reporters afterwards that the meeting was "very friendly."

He said that Aziz outlined the history of relations between Iraq and UNSCOM, which are currently at a low ebb following Saturday's adoption of a new Security Council resolution threatening Baghdad with possible new sanctions unless Iraqi officials cooperate with UNSCOM.

Butler said that Aziz "Offered full cooperation. So that was a good way to start and I'm very satisfied."

Butler added that he intended to perform his new duties with objectivity, including

as far as possible avoiding political statements because that's not my job."

Iraq has been under UN sanctions since the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The crippling oil embargo can only be lifted when UNSCOM certifies that Iraq has destroyed all its biological and chemical weaponry and missiles.

Road mishap kills 30 in Lucknow

LUCKNOW, June 26: Thirty people were killed and 12 injured when a bus carrying them skidded off the road and fell into a ditch near Dharas in Uttar Pradesh' Pithoragarh district this evening, reports PTI.

The ill-fated bus, belonging to Uttar Pradesh Roadways Corporation, was carrying 47 people, reports reaching here said. The injured were admitted to nearby hospital. Senior district and police officials have rushed to the scene of accident.

Off the Record

Human skin — source of natural antibiotic

LONDON: Human skin produce a natural antibiotic that helps protect the body from invading bacteria, German researchers said Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Jens Schroeder and colleagues at the University of Kiel dubbed the antibiotic human beta-defensin-2 (HBD-2) and said it could form the basis for new drugs.

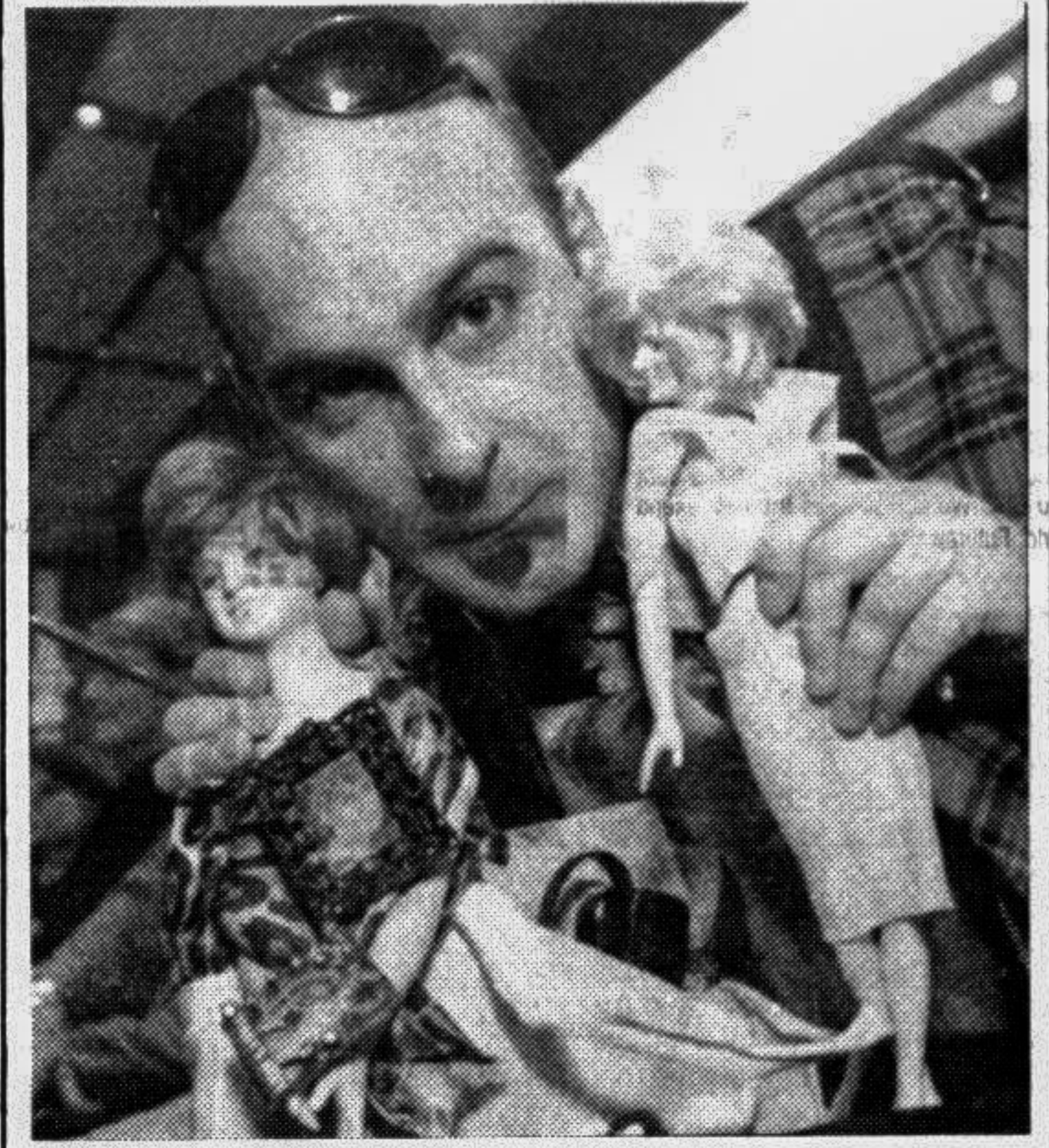
"Our observations show that human skin contains a chemical shield," they wrote in a letter to the science journal Nature.

"Disruption of this shield, as in cystic fibrosis, might be a reason for recurrent infections of skin," they added.

They found the antibiotic while investigating why people with psoriasis, which causes itching and flaking, did not have more skin infections.

Tests showed the antibiotic was very effective against common bacteria like ecoli — one strain of which causes food poisoning — and the infectious yeast candida albicans.

It was less effective against staphylococcus bacteria, which naturally live on the skin and which can sometimes cause fatal infections.



Jeffery Clagett of Baltimore MD, a celebrity clothes collector, poses with his "Diana Dolls" Wednesday before the auction at Christie's in New York of dresses belonging to Diana, Princess of Wales. Some 80 of Diana's old dresses are up for auction with the proceeds to be donated to charity. — AFP/UNB photo

Teacher or terrorist?

MOSCOW: A school teacher in a Ural Mountains town tossed a grenade at his neighbour during an argument, injuring the man, and then committed suicide by exploding another grenade, a news report said Wednesday, reports AP.

The teacher, identified only by his last name, Shipachev, appeared to have been drunk, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported, citing police in Magnitogorsk, about 1,400 kilometres (870 miles) east of Moscow. The report gave no other reason for the argument or the attack.

The neighbour, a pensioner who was not identified, was hospitalised with multiple wounds, ITAR-Tass said.

Investigators said Shipachev probably brought the grenade from Russia's breakaway republic of Chechnya, after visiting his son who served there. The republic is still teeming with weapons after a 21-month war between separatists and Russian forces.

Japanese man finishes walk across Arctic Ocean

TOKYO: After failing three times, a Japanese man succeeded in walking all the way across the frozen Arctic Ocean alone, his supporters said Tuesday, reports AP.

Mitsuru Oba arrived at Resolute, northern Canada, by airplane Monday several hours after ending the four-month, 1,730-kilometre (1,080-mile) walk farther north, said a statement released by his office in Japan.

The office, in Kawasaki, just southwest of Tokyo, said it got the news from Oba by radio early Tuesday. Oba left February 23 from Russia's Komsomolets Island.

Civil war resumes in Brazzaville

KINSHASA, June 26: Brazzaville's civil war has resumed, Congolese President Pascal Lissouba announced after heavy weapons fire in the capital intensified late Wednesday.

"The war is resuming, the war has resumed. It hasn't ended," Lissouba told AFP by telephone from the shattered city.

The militia of Marxist opposition leader Denis Sassou Nguesso "Have said they wanted war," Lissouba added, apparently confirming the ceasefire agreed last week was no longer in force.

It's Sassou who wants to destroy us, who wants to fight, kill, loot, call him to find out if he's happy now. We want to

protect democracy — we are protecting it. Him, I don't know what he's protecting," the President said.

Sporadic shelling and small-arms fire arched through the city Wednesday, bringing the violence to its worst point before the ceasefire announcement last Wednesday.

A diplomatic source in Brazzaville said: "It's rough, the gunfire exchanges are intense, affecting the centre of the city and probably the airport. The ceasefire, put in place while two mediation committees rushed to find a peaceful solution to the crisis, seemed over Monday as heavy arms fire erupted on both sides."