

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 Sherwan, India's minister of state for foreign affairs, and Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, signed the new treaty agreement. In a joint communiqué 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 Sabarmati 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 spokeswoman said. AFP reports from Elmsford.

Albright was originally planning to arrive in Phnom Penh on Friday to press leaders there to make progress in solidifying peace and to work toward holding elections on schedule next year. But fighting on June 17 in the Cambodian capital between units loyal to the two Cambodian co-premiers raised concerns about the safety of Washington's top diplomat and her entourage.

Aircrash 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, 100 km (62 miles) west of Madrid, the Spanish news agency EFE said. AFP reports from Madrid.

The accident occurred soon after the plane had taken off from Madrid 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 kilometers (460 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 men 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 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 Fretelin 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 Ariane 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 Kourou, 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

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," Nelle Xipp, who was interned at the age of seven in the camp at Aek Pamine 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 in post-war intergovernmental settlement.

International

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 Mujahedeen of the Islamic army captured Ghormach district and are advancing on Faryab, declared the state-run radio Sharai.

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 Sharai reported 75 enemy fighters were captured and another 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 Tigray Turkistan mountain-range — which overlooks the western province of Badghis, they announced today. Reports AFP.

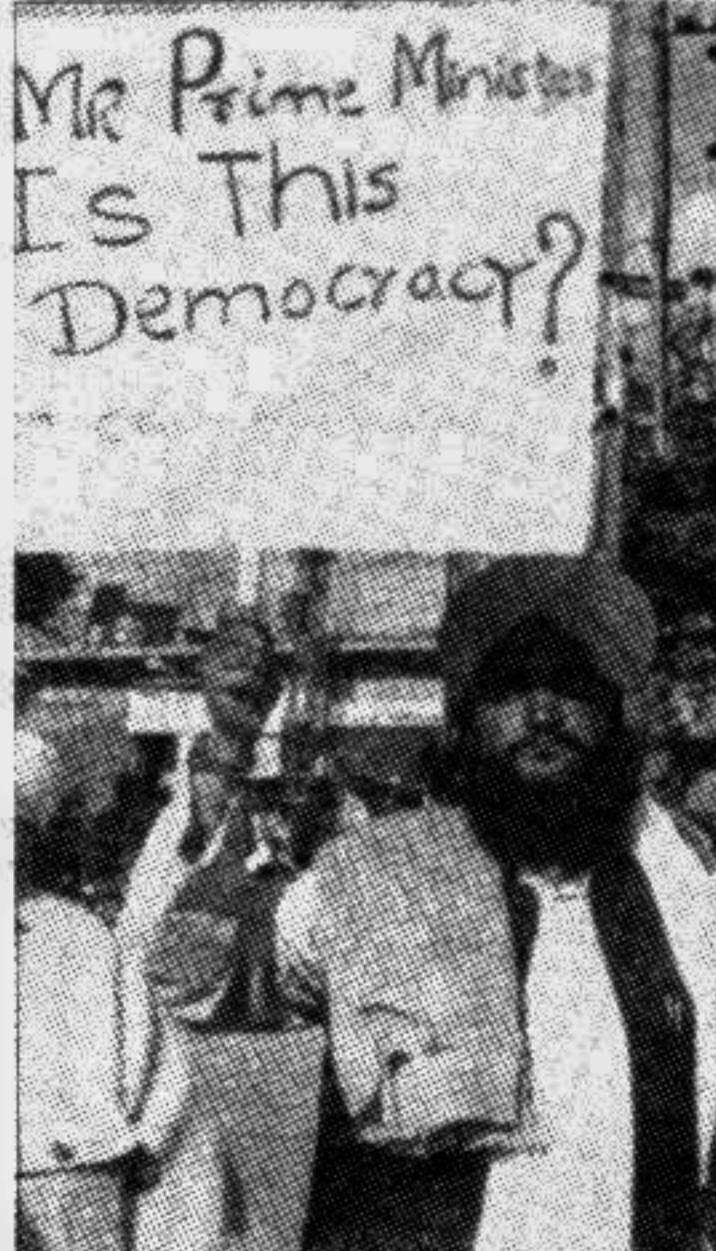
Anti-Taliban forces in western Afghanistan are under the command of Uzbek general Abdul Malik, who last May defected from the Islamic militants to revolt again in a dispute over power-sharing.

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 city.

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.

This force had set out from



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 Periyamadu, 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.

— AFP/UNB photo

— AP photo