

Earth Summit ends in failure, widens North-South rift

UNITED NATIONS, June 28: The Earth Summit ended in failure early today, with a North-South rift and EU-US tensions preventing agreement on major environmental issues such as global warming and forest protection, reports AFP.

The summit's final document, adopted by consensus early Saturday after hours of wrangling, noted that participants were "deeply concerned that overall trends for sustainable development are worse today than they were in 1992."

UN General Assembly President Razali Ismail told delegates that "the overall results of the special session are sobering."

"These point to the enormous difficulties of overcoming short-term and vested interest that would enable concrete commitments to specific targets and to global programmes."

"Our words have not been matched by deeds. Such an honest appraisal is a result in itself," he said, blaming the outcome on the "absence of political will" to tackle long-term issues.

The United States successfully rebuffed European calls

for a convention to protect forests, and watered down a text on global warming which avoided any mention of specific targets to curb greenhouse gases blamed for climate change.

The European were also bruised when developing nations rejected an "undertaking" by the European Union to raise development aid levels by the end of the century.

Dutch Development Cooperation Minister Jan Pronk said the Europeans were taken a back, because the southern countries had complained about the financial issues in speeches to the summit and in the negotiations all week.

UN delegates had hoped that the five-day summit, called to review progress since the 1992 Rio environment conference, would send a political signal to a climate change meeting scheduled in December in Kyoto, Japan.

But it was clear after US President Bill Clinton told the meeting on Thursday that his country was not yet ready to commit, that no announcement on targets and deadlines would be set.

The atmosphere was so tense between developed countries and developing states in the group of 77, that after marathon negotiations on a political statement ending at dawn Friday, the summit decided to drop the text altogether after failing to reach agreement.

The Group of 77 complained that the North had failed to live up to its commitments on transferring financial and technological resources, notably to earmark 0.7 per cent of gross national product for development.

The figure currently stands at less than 0.3 per cent — a 25-year low.

The final document appeals for the trend to be reversed, and for the 0.7 per cent target to be met "as soon as possible."

On forest protection, the summit attended by more than 160 government representatives postponed a decision on whether to negotiate a legally-binding convention until 1999.

On freshwater supplies, faced with growing shortages and pollution the summit called for "urgent action" and decided to endorse a proposal

from French President Jacques Chirac for a Paris Conference next year.

The US delegation insisted that the summit produced "a positive outcome."

"We achieved our aims," Rafe Pomerance, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Environment and Development told AFP.

He noted that as the summit was a review conference, on global warming "there wasn't anything new going to come out of this conference."

On forest protection, "instead of the convention that the Europeans wanted, we can focus on immediate assistance for forests," he said.

But Tanzanian Ambassador Daudi Mwakawaga, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 said: "We had expected significant movement. The outcome is quite to the contrary."

Pronk said he hoped that future review conferences would adopt a totally different structure, to prevent the renegotiation of agreements. Otherwise, "the risk that you go backwards rather than forward at the review conference is quite big."

Bangladesh blames developed world for tardy progress on Agenda 21

Suman Guha Mozumder writes from United Nations

Bangladesh has blamed developed countries for the lack of progress in implementing the environment action plan drawn up at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

The lack of seriousness on the part of the developed countries and the absence of assistance to developing countries has resulted in little progress being achieved on the Agenda 21," Bangladesh's Environment Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury told IANS after addressing the Special Session of the General Assembly to review implementation of the Rio decisions.

"We are not hopeful that anything new will come out of this session. In the last few days what we have seen is the endless number of speeches but hardly anything concrete," she said.

Mrs Chowdhury met her Indian counterpart Saifuddin Soz as well as British Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe among others on the sidelines of the session.

In her address to the General Assembly, Mrs Chowdhury said the world needs to give "a new

dynamism to the Rio process at this session."

Mrs Chowdhury said, "We do not want sterile speeches here. We want action spurred by sincere and serious commitment to Agenda 21." She presented an eight-point list of concerns which she said must be addressed on a priority basis.

One of these concerns relates to fresh water supply and management which, she said, needs top priority attention and action.

"In Bangladesh and also reportedly in parts of India and China, possible over-exploitation of ground water has led to arsenic contamination in tubewell water posing serious health hazards," she said.

"The emerging problem has the potential of causing serious damage to present and future generations if it is not addressed now," she added.

She said Bangladesh has made "sincere efforts" to integrate environmental concerns in developmental decision-making and adapting policies, plans and strategies. "Although we have undertaken far-reaching reform and adaptation measures, international support to

these efforts in most cases was not forthcoming as committed," she said.

"In this context, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Ministerial Declaration on implementation of Agenda 21 adopted in April is very relevant," she said.

Asked about Bangladesh's position on a proposed forest convention, which countries like Russia have supported, Mrs Chowdhury said while protection of forests was an issue which needed special attention, "leaders from the developed countries need to look at the whole world scenario."

"I think the member states of the SAARC group can help each other more than any other country as far as the issue of protecting forests is concerned," she told IANS. For one, she said, other countries do not focus much on social forestry programmes which countries like Bangladesh have done.

However, in answer to a question, she admitted that unlike India, where the judiciary has taken a great interest in environmental issues, the courts in Bangladesh do not generally

take cognizance of issues like environmental pollution. "We are in the process of making new legislation," she said.

Pakistan meanwhile said that eradication of poverty is imperative to arrest growing environmental degradation in the world.

"Poverty and environmental degradation are deeply intertwined," Environment Minister Syeda Abida Hussain told the General Assembly Session.

She said that growing poverty, stagnating economies, burgeoning populations, fragile institutions and diversion of meagre resources towards debt servicing are among factors which have led to shrinking human welfare and deteriorating environment. "To give a telling example," she said, "more than half of Pakistan's revenues will be expended on debt servicing during the current fiscal year."

Mrs Hussain said socio-economic stagnation in developing countries had perpetuated the unsustainable exploitation of all natural resources.

— India Abroad News Service

BRIEFLY

Hashimoto ends US trip: Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto returned in Tokyo by special plane Saturday, ending a 10-day tour of the United States and Europe packed with high-profile meetings. AFP reports from Tokyo. He attended a summit of eight major powers in Denver, Colorado, then went to New York for the UN "earth summit" on environmental problems, followed by meetings with top European Union leaders in the Hague. Hashimoto also took in Japan's first summit talks with the leaders of five Scandinavian countries in Bergen, Norway, during the tour.

Betty Shabazz laid to rest: Three decades after Malcolm X was laid to rest in an Islamic rite, Betty Shabazz followed her husband to the grave Friday in the same faith — leaving her own civil-rights legacy. AP reports from New York.

"Our sister Betty Shabazz died by burning. May Allah forgive the person who did that," an imam told mourners at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Manhattan during a prefuneral prayer service. Prayers in Arabic and English came over a loudspeaker in a street-level prayer room marked "For sisters only," where hundreds of women, some with children, bowed in neat rows before a prayer rug on the wall. They wore multicoloured dresses and head coverings with only their faces visible. Following custom, women were separated from men at the service.

Road mishap claims 14 in India: Fourteen people were killed when a bus in which they were travelling rolled off a bridge in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, AFP says from New Delhi.

Twenty-five others were injured in the accident late Friday, no further details were available.

Sharon meets top PLO official: Hardline Israeli cabinet minister Ariel Sharon met a top PLO official this month for talks on advancing the peace process. Israeli and Palestinian officials said on Friday, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

Sharon, tipped to become Finance Minister in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet, has been one of the government's fiercest opponents of peace deals with the PLO, branding Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat a terrorist. They both said the talks were conducted in a positive atmosphere. They talked for about two-and-a-half hours on ways to advance the peace process, said Israeli-Arab legislator Abdul Wahab Darawshe, who initiated the meeting between Sharon and Mahmud Abbas better known as Abu Mazen.

Blast in train kills 3 in Moscow: A bomb went off on a train between Moscow and St Petersburg on Friday, killing three people and wounding seven, an emergency ministry official said, Reuter reports from Moscow.

"It was a bomb which was hidden in the toilets of one of the carriages," a duty officer told Reuters, he said the incident happened at around 6:30 PM (1430 GMT). Another official said train number 24, heading for St Petersburg, was near Torbino station in the Novgorod region northwest of Moscow when the blast occurred.



Mourners walk past flowers and a picture of Betty Shabazz before entering the Islamic Cultural Centre in New York where the private funeral service for Betty Shabazz took place Friday. Shabazz, the widow of slain black leader Malcolm X, died June 23 of burns suffered when her apartment was set ablaze, allegedly by her grandson Malcolm Shabazz — AFP/UNB photo

Myanmar junta accused of using forced labour

WASHINGTON, June 28: Myanmar has forced millions of its citizens into slavery over the past several years in one of the world's worst human rights abuses, several groups charged on Friday, reports Reuter.

At a fact finding hearing that is part of an international investigation, human rights and labour groups said the military government for Burma or Myanmar, organised its forced labour system around 1991, mostly to rebuild infrastructure, such as highway and railroads.

The widespread use of forced labour by the Myanmar military regime truly one of the great crimes of our time and

this, hearing contributes to the growing awareness of its dimension and inhumanity, said Phil Fishman, assistant director of the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Department.

The AFL-CIO, a federation of 78 US labour unions helped prepare a complaint last year by worker delegates to the governing body of the International Labour Organisation, which led to the creation of a commission of inquiry.

The commission will hold six days of hearings in Geneva in November to examine charges that Myanmar violated an ILO Convention against forced labour that it ratified in 1955.

It is only the night time in the ILO's 78-year-history that such a panel has been created.

"It is a matter of the gravest concern to the (Clinton) administration and to the Department of Labour," said Andrew Samet who heads the US Labour Department's Bureau of International Affairs and conducted Friday's hearing.

Last month President Bill Clinton cited Myanmar's "severe repression" and he issued an order virtually banning new investment in the country by US citizens and companies.

The United States, the fourth largest investor in Myanmar, has halted direct financial aid,

Mobutu hospitalised in Morocco

PARIS, June 28: Exiled former Zairian dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, ailing with prostate cancer, checked into a Moroccan hospital Friday, a hospital official said, though Mobutu's son said his father was "fine," reports AP.

France has refused to allow Mobutu entry for medical treatment, said Mobutu's son, Nzanga Mobutu.

French Foreign Ministry spokesman Jacques Rummelhardt declined to comment on whether Mobutu had requested a French visa for medical treatment.

An official at the Avicenne Hospital in the capital, Rabat, said Mobutu checked into his own private section of the hospital, but refused to give any other information. The official, interviewed by phone, identified himself as a member of the hospital management but declined to give his name.

Nzanga Mobutu, said his father was "doing fine," and would return later Friday to the luxury hotel in Tangier where he has been staying.

US developing new non-lethal weapons

WASHINGTON, June 28: The Pentagon is developing weapons that can "knock out, knock down or otherwise disable enemies," without killing them, the weekly magazine US News and world report says, reports AFP.

In its latest issue available Monday, the magazine says it conducted a three-month investigation and interviewed more than 70 experts to document the Pentagon's growing interest in these reportedly non-lethal weapons.

"Now that the Cold War has ended and the United States is engaged in more humanitarian and peacekeeping missions, the search for weapons that could incapacitate people without inflicting lethal injuries has intensified," US News says.

Laser weapons capable of temporarily or permanently blinding people already are available, according to the

magazine.

Citing the Pentagon, US News says "acoustic" weapons can vibrate the insides of enemies to stun them make them feel sick or "liquify their bowels and reduce them to quivering diarrhetic messes."

US News says the Pentagon also has experimented with electromagnetic waves to put human targets to sleep or to heat them up, on the microwave oven principle.

Yet another weapon under way is the "sonic cannon" that can produce shock waves strong enough to knock down an enemy.

Some weapons specialists expressed skepticism about this unconventional technology.

"It won't end bloodshed and wars," predicted Harvey Sapolsky, head of the securities studies programme at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Breakthrough in explaining mechanics of how we taste

MIAMI, June 28: Scientists at the University of Miami said on Friday they believed they had made a major breakthrough in one of the lingering mysteries of human physiology — explaining the mechanics of how we taste, reports Reuter.

But at the centre of their discovery is not saltiness, sweetness, sourness or bitterness but what some scientists consider a fifth basic taste — "umami" (Japanese for "delicious" or "yummy"). It is the taste of monosodium glutamate (MSG), the powdered food additive that gives some people uncomfortable sensations at Chinese restaurants.

"Taste is a critical sense, and we don't know how it works, especially at a molecular level," Nirupa Chaudhari, an Associate Professor of Physiology at the University of Miami School of Medicine, said in an interview.

Researchers have been trying for at least 30 years to ex-

plain how the characteristics of something on the human tongue are communicated to cells in the brain to create the final concept of how something tastes.

For much of that time, they have been searching for molecules that might be responsible for transduction, the activity of tiny bits of taste bud cells able to read a flavour characteristic of a piece of food and convert it into electrical signal that can be communicated to the brain.

Chaudhari and co-researcher Stephen Roper, a Professor of Physiology at the University of Miami School of Medicine are the first researchers to have discovered what they believe is one of those molecules, the receptor for "umami."

"Glutamate is a common, natural component of many different foods," Roper said, listing Parmesan cheese, ham, tomatoes and even grape fruit,



Visitors admire Antonio Canova's sculpture representing Pauline Borghese Bonaparte at the Borghese Gallery in Rome Friday. The Borghese Gallery, a sanctuary of Baroque art that resigns over Rome's north side and the capital's most visited museum until its closure for restoration in 1983, reopens its doors to the public Saturday. — AFP/UNB photo

Political parties in Albania wrap up polls campaign

TIRANA, June 28: With Socialists promising to rid the country of President Sali Berisha, political parties on Friday wrapped up a violence-marred campaign for Albania's most important elections since the end of Stalinist rule, reports AP.

"Albania is at risk and we are living in difficult times," Socialist leader Fatos Nano told about 10,000 supporters on Tirana's central Skanderbeg Square. "That's why our country must be safe from the claws of the dictator Berisha."

Police detain 34 in East Timor for questioning

DILI, Indonesia, June 28: At least 34 people have been detained for questioning following a series of attacks by separatist rebels in East Timor since over the past month, a security official said on Saturday, reports AP.

Col Atok Rismanto, police chief in Dili, the capital of East Timor, said the detentions included one on Saturday when six rebels in a truck opened fire on an Indonesian military convoy and killed a driver east of Dili.

Rebel activity in the territory, invaded by Indonesia in 1975 and annexed the following year, has flared up since Indonesian national elections last month. An estimated 42 soldiers, police, civilians and rebels have been killed in attacks by rebels since May.

Officials said on condition of anonymity that most of those arrested had been questioned and released.

Off the Record

Get ready to reset your watches as a leap second is coming

PARIS: Get ready to reset your watches: A leap second is coming, reports AP.

"The Earth has been turning too slowly," explained Martine Feissel, director of the grandly named International Earth Rotation Service, the organisation that decides every six months whether the world needs to add or subtract a second.

The leap second, the 21st ordered by the IERS since 1972, will occur at midnight Monday — briefly delaying the onset of Tuesday.

The change will affect everything that is synchronised by satellites — from communication, navigation and air traffic control systems to the computers that link global financial markets.

The pause also will have historic importance in Hong Kong, where dignitaries from around the world will gather to mark the British colony's 12:01 am handover to China on Tuesday.

A byproduct of the atomic age, leap seconds became necessary as a result of the switch from astronomically determined Greenwich Mean Time to the atomic-based Coordinated Universal Time in 1972.

Since then, friction from winds and tides has slowed the Earth's rotation, and the planet simply has not been able to keep up with atomic time.

Airport lounge turns into delivery room

CAIRO: Cairo Airport turned one of its transit lounges into a delivery room Friday morning when a passenger unexpectedly went into labour while boarding an Egyptian plane to the Saudi city of Jeddah, reports Reuter.

Fatma Ahmed Yassin, an Egyptian gave birth to a baby boy in the transit lounge under the supervision of the airport's quarantine officer, airport sources said.

She and the baby later went to hospital for observation.

Search for fortunes

WATERFORD, Ireland: Talk about happy endings, reports AP.

Readers at a library in this southeastern Irish town recently discovered scratch lottery cards in books they borrowed. Several won cash prizes of up to 100 pounds (dls 160).

That prompted library staff to conduct a search which uncovered 1,000 lottery cards almost immediately.

"There may be thousands of cards still to be located," city librarian Richard Fennessey said Friday. "Hundreds of people have been turning up to browse here after what has happened."

Fennessey said he had no idea who the literacy maven was.

"It might even be a library member who feels guilty about an outstanding fine for overdue books," he said.

In any case, not a discriminating reader — the scratchcards were turning up in all types of books, both fiction and non-fiction.

HK newsmen begin self-censorship fearing control on media after handover

HONG KONG, June 28: Fear of a clampdown on media freedoms when China resumes sovereignty of Hong Kong has already led some reporters and editors to censor themselves, the Hong Kong Journalists Association said Friday in an annual report, reports AP.

Some, including two outspoken anti-Communist columnists, have already left the profession, and others plan to quit after the handover Tuesday that ends British rule, the report said.

It said a survey by the Chinese University of Hong Kong found that one-fifth of Hong Kong's reporters had applied to emigrate, largely because of mounting political pressure.

The report titled "The Die is Cast," was written jointly by the association and Article 19, a London-based anti-censorship group.

China has promised Hong

Kong will keep its freedom after the handover, but the Beijing-appointed future leader of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, has already told the association that Hong Kong reporters need to be more "socially responsible," said Carol Lal, chairwoman of the association.

She said she concluded from the May meeting with Tung that "We are quite different on the question of press freedoms. I think for him the more important thing is to have stability even at the expense of press freedom."

The 57-page report concluded, "It is self-censorship, rather than direct intervention, that will more likely undermine freedom of expression in the future. On the eve of the handover, Hong Kong appears to be in the grip of a renewed and more virulent bout of this insidious disease."

For instance, Lal said, Hong

Kong reporters no longer call the June 4 crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy student protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square a "massacre." Instead, they have all adopted the official Chinese label, "the June 4 incident."

In other cases, stories critical of China that once would have been immediately printed are now being delayed by editors who demand more reporting, or are simply killed, she said.

The report cited the example of Ming Pao, an independent Chinese-language daily, which in March told two of its columnists, strong critics of China, that they should write less.

Two other leading columnists also succumbed to the pressure. Lo Pu, who has written for several leading publications, left Hong Kong last month for the United States.

His most recent diatribe was a poem poking fun at the deputy director of Beijing's de facto consulate in Hong Kong, Zhang Junsheng.

Another China critic, Paul Lin, who writes under the pen name Ling Feng, has decided to leave because Chinese authorities have told him they consider his work subversive.

The report also took Britain to task for leaving the colony with "a number of significant and repressive laws, particularly security-related laws" on the books that will be "an open invitation to abuse."

But Lai urged her colleagues to stand fast and continue to report the news, saying: "It is our own responsibility to speak out for ourselves."

Meanwhile, China will begin moving in 4,000 military personnel by land, sea and air, six hours after recovering

sovereignty over Hong Kong, the incoming government announced Friday, says another AP report.

Gov. Chris Patten sharply protested, saying the armored cars would enter urban areas on Tuesday, sending "a very bad signal to Hong Kong and the rest of the world."

Bob Howlett, a spokesman for future leader Tung Chee-hwa, said the armored cars would go straight to their barracks. Two of these are on Hong Kong island, reachable only via crowded urban areas.

An official in the incoming government, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the deployment was in line with the past British military practice, and he suggested Patten was overreacting.

China takes over the British colony at the stroke on midnight Monday (1600 GMT). The troops will arrive six hours

later.

It has long been known that China will deploy up to 10,000 troops in Hong Kong as a symbol of its newly recovered sovereignty over what is to be a semi-autonomous territory responsible for its own internal affairs.

The number would roughly match British troop levels in recent years, but until now, no announcement had been made about major troop movements on the day of the handover.

Almost 200 unarmed troops of the People's Liberation Army are already in Hong Kong, paving the way for the main force, and 509 lightly armed soldiers are to drive in three hours before the handover ceremony.

Speaking to reporters, Patten said it would be proper that China would send troops to Hong Kong "as a symbol of Chinese sovereignty."

Main Serb suspect in '91 massacre arrested

THE HAGUE, June 28: A principal suspect in the 1991 massacre of more than 200 people in Vukovar was arrested Friday by agents of the International War Crimes Tribunal, the United Nations announced, says AP.

Slavko Dokmanovic, 47, was arrested in the eastern Slavonia region of Croatia, the UN statement said, and was transported to the war crimes tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands.

He was indicted by the tribunal for his role in a November 1991 incident in which Serb paramilitary forces took about 260 men from the hospital in the town of Vukovar, transported them to Ovcara and allegedly shot them.

Dokmanovic's indictment was issued secretly on March

26, 1996, and no details of the charges against him were immediately available.

Investigators exhumed a mass grave near Ovcara in 1996 and recovered more than 200 bodies, according to the United Nations.

Dokmanovic was the Serb mayor of Vukovar, which rebel Serbs seized in the Croatian war. Three Yugoslav army officers also have been charged in the massacre but remain at large.

Tribunal spokesman Christian Chartier said the arrest should spur Belgrade authorities into handing over the three officers.

International arrest warrants have been issued for the men, but Serbian authorities say their constitution bars the extradition of Serbs.