

### Bid to prevent rioting Israel restricts Palestinian entry into Hebron

HEBRON, July 4: Israel restricted Palestinian entry into Hebron Friday to prevent extensive rioting in the West Bank town where stone-throwers have clashed with soldiers all week, reports AP.

An army statement said only Palestinian residents of Hebron would be allowed past roadblocks set up at the town entrance.

Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, commander of the West Bank and central Israel, said troops were deploying Friday with a very tense situation on the ground.

The army said all joint Israeli-Palestinian patrols also were canceled.

Israel fears that speakers at Friday prayers will incite worshippers to violence in protest of an anti-Muslim film posted in Hebron last weekend.

The poster showed a caricature of the Prophet Mohammed as a pig stomping on the Koran, the Muslim holy book. A 25-year-old Jewish extremist is being held on suspicion she distributed the posters.

The poster led to daily stone-throwing protests in Hebron where two Israeli soldiers were wounded Tuesday by a pipe bomb, one seriously. After the incident, Israeli troops started

using live ammunition to quell riots.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that Israel would take tougher measures to stop the violence and accused Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority of organizing the Hebron clashes.

Arafat Thursday denied that he was orchestrating the riots, telling journalists that "Netanyahu knows it is not true."

### Shooting erupts in Tirana

TIRANA, July 4: Shooting erupted in central Tirana on Thursday during a march organised by monarchist from the Skanderbeg Square to the headquarters of the central electoral commission, reports Reuter.

Around 500 supporters of the King, who was wanted to restore to the throne were involved in the march. It was not immediately clear who was involved in the shooting.

Witnesses said the shooting appeared to be aimed in the air and one person was being carried by two or three people after apparently being injured.

## Indian opposition warns of fresh election

NEW DELHI, July 4: The Indian opposition warned today of fresh elections as Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's party headed towards a split that could oust the country's coalition government, reports AFP.

The Hindu nationalists predicted the break-up would be followed by the chief ally of Gujral's minority United Front government, the Congress (I) Party, withdrawing its parliamentary support.

If the Congress withdraws support, the possibility of another government being formed is very remote, said Ashwarty Sinha, spokesman for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India's largest party.

"Which means we will have fresh elections to parliament," he added. "The congress is certainly taking this country towards a general election."

Sinha said he believed Congress statements were "A clear indication" the party would push for new elections late this year or early next year should Gujral's Janata Dal formally split as expected.

Congress president Sitaram Kesri was quoted in today's newspapers as urging party members to prepare for another election. The last parliament-

ary polls were held in 1996. The next one is due in 2001.

Gujral became the Prime Minister in April after the congress, the second largest group in the hung parliament after the Hindu nationalist BJP, ousted the previous United Front government by withdrawing its backing.

Gujral's Janata Dal, the dominant member in the present United Front coalition, virtually split Thursday when supporters of party president Laloo Prasad Yadav boycotted balloting for a new president.

A split in the party will undermine Gujral's authority and has the potential to bring down the government.

Gujral cast his ballot here Thursday and made a last-minute appeal to the party's rival factions to bury the hatchet. But newspapers said the party was expected to break up Saturday, when Laloo Prasad Yadav's supporters are to gather here in a show of strength and are widely expected to announce the birth of rival group.

A Yadav supporter admitted a parting of ways was imminent. "I don't think we can work together," Ram Kripal, a mem-

ber of parliament, told AFP. "I think we will split. Anyway, we will follow whatever our leader says."

Sharad Yadav, who is to be crowned the Janata Dal's new president, said he was ready to make peace with Yadav.

"Those who have boycotted the polls were well within their rights," a conciliatory Sharad Yadav said, adding he would do his best to convince outgoing president Laloo Yadav.

Although an overwhelming majority of the Janata Dal's leaders nationwide took part in Thursday's polls, Laloo Yadav supporters from his home state of Bihar — including half-a-dozen ministers — stayed away in response to his call.

The BJP's Sinha, said his party was happy over the developments.

"The Janata Dal has split, for all practical purposes," he said. "The division only remains to be formalised... we don't mind the elections. This is the only way out of the present impasse."

The BJP formed a shortlived government here for the first time in May 1996 but it collapsed within 13 days after failing to prove its majority.

### Efforts on to prepare for landing on Mars

PASADENA, Calif., July 4: Scientists worked frantically on Thursday to prepare for the first landing on Mars in 21 years as the pathfinder space probe neared its target, reports Reuter.

"We are back, and we are back to stay this time," declared Wesley Huntress, the associate administrator for space science at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The last spacecraft to land on Mars was the Viking mission in 1976.

Huntress said pathfinder — with its "Mars Buggy" the rover — was the first of 10 spacecraft that would either land on or orbit the planet over the next eight years. Culminating in the actual collection of rocks and their return to Earth.

Meanwhile, the 200-strong pathfinder crew at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena were preparing for any eventuality when the craft touches down at 10:07 am PDT (1707 GMT) today for an Independence Day landing.

"At 4 am Pacific time (1100 GMT), pathfinder entered Mars' influence. I think it's safe to say we are all under Mars' influence down here as well," Brian Muirhead, the deputy project manager, told reporters.

## Over 400 illegal immigrant Chinese children press for residency rights in HK

HONG KONG, July 4: More than 400 illegal immigrant children from China and their families jammed Hong Kong's immigration department on Thursday to press for residency rights in this newly handed-back special region, reports Reuter.

The children, whose parents are Hong Kong residents, were among hundreds of minors who crossed over earlier this year in hope of claiming a right of abode after Britain's handover to China.

Under Hong Kong's post-handover constitution, the basic law, effective on July 1, children born to Hong Kong permanent residents are entitled to the same status.

However, Hong Kong's new chief Tung Chee-Hwa has said children who came in illegally without waiting for proper clearance procedures would be repatriated.

Chanting slogans and waving copies of the basic law, the protesting families said the government had no legal grounds to deport the children.

"I've read the basic law, there's no doubt that my children can enjoy the right of abode immediately," said Wong Shui-Ching whose wife and

three children were smuggled into Hong Kong after years of separation.

"We're here to fight for justice," he said. After an hour's meeting with the protesters, the immigration department promised not to deport the illegal minors before their identity can be confirmed.

## Muslim models barred from fashion shows in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, July 4: Kuala Lumpur modelling agencies are barring Muslim models from fashion shows because of new religious rules on indecent dressing, reports said today, says AFP.

Andrew Tan of Andrew's Models said he would limit Muslim models to traditional costumes and not allow them to take part in fashion shows.

"We have to respect the department's decision. And I have to safeguard my models or else they will be arrested and embarrassed," Tan was quoted as saying by The Star newspaper.

## Off the Record

### Greetings from space

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida: Space shuttle Columbia's astronauts took time out from their high-flying laboratory work Thursday to wish fellow Americans a happy Independence Day, reports AP.

"We recognise just how lucky we are to be Americans," said commander James Halsell Jr in a videotaped message. "Maybe even more so because we're not in the country right now. We're orbiting 185 miles (300 kilometers) above the surface of the Earth."

Halsell, an air Force lieutenant colonel, noted that he and his crew aren't the only Americans away from home this July 4th. He cited military and foreign service employees, as well as NASA astronaut Michael Foale aboard Russia's crippled space station Mir.

"Our hearts are with him," Halsell said. Columbia's crew spent Thursday wrestling with a stuck wrench.

### Ghost in toilet

BOMBAY: Armed police in a west Indian city are keeping watch outside a women's 'haunted' public toilet to ward off a ghost terrorising its occupants, newspapers said Friday, reports AFP.

The Asian Age newspaper said the ghost had been sighted in a suburb of Nashik city, some 200 kilometres (125 miles) east of here. A young woman who claimed that she was slapped by the ghost has been admitted to a local hospital "in a state of shock".

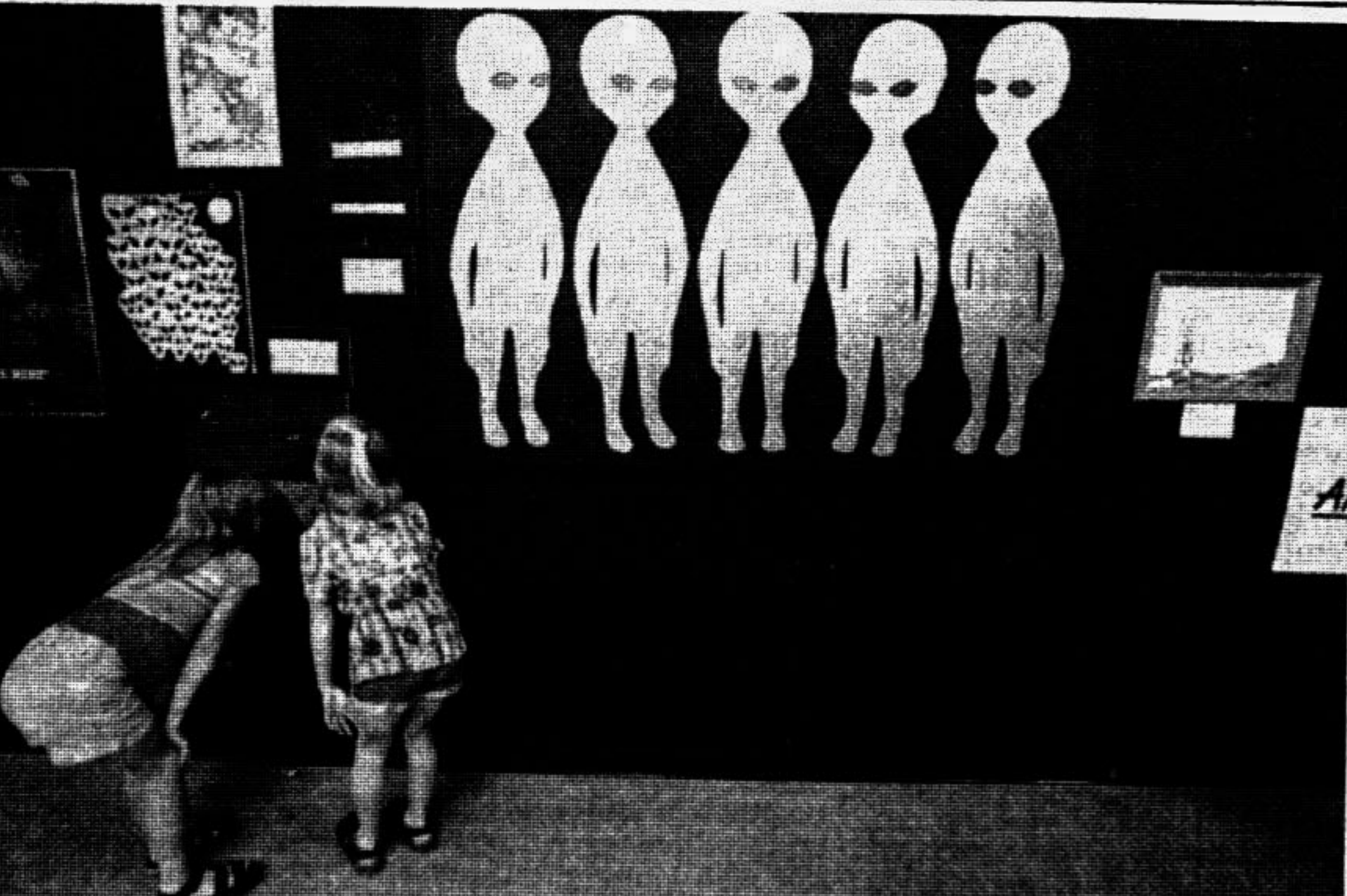
The newspaper said several other women claimed to have seen the ghost dancing on the toilet wall. Police have appealed for calm. The Age, however, suggested the ghost story could be connected to the sale of a plot of land nearby, which was being held up because of the public convenience. If women refused to use it, it argued, it would be easier to clear the land for sale.

## Now, it's human brain on burglars target list

WICKFORD, England: Burglars stole a human brain from a laboratory, police said Thursday, and left everything else untouched, reports AP.

The brain, kept in a plastic container in a liquid solution of formaldehyde, was taken from the laboratory in Wickford, east of London, sometime between Tuesday night and Wednesday morning.

"We understand the brain was a couple of years old and was kept for research purposes," said a police spokesman, speaking with customary anonymity. Police issued a public safety warning, saying that the formaldehyde solution could cause irritation to the skin, eyes and affect breathing and particularly dangerous if swallowed.



Children look at pictures displayed in the "International UFO Museum and Research Centre" in Roswell, New Mexico Thursday. The museum features UFO phenomenon exhibits, a gift shop and a bar called "The Alien Caffeine Espresso Bar". Roswell is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the alleged UFO crash in July 1947. — AFP/UNB photo

## Anti-defection law raises fears in Pakistan

Tariq Butt writes from Islamabad

The Anti-defection Bill passed by Pakistan's Parliament, though welcomed as a move that would strengthen democracy, has raised fears that it could make party chiefs more autocratic in their functioning.

The bill, passed Sunday after a constitutional amendment, gives absolute powers to the presidents of political parties to unseat their MPs if they commit breach of discipline, constitution, code of conduct and declared policies of the party or vote on any bill in Parliament against the direction of their leaders.

The judicial system, even the Supreme Court, has no jurisdiction over this new anti-defection law.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said of the passage of the bill: "It is a historic day as we have buried 'lotocracy' (turncoatism)."

Floor-crossing — known as "lotocracy" in Pakistan — by MPs for a price has frequently destabilised the democratic system. Prime Minister Sharif had pledged during his election campaign that he would introduce a strict law to end the practice of political defections.

Ms Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister and leader of the opposition, said the amendment would strengthen democratic system.

In an editorial "A welcome amendment" The Nation said that "hopefully the anti-defection law will promote cleanliness and honesty in politics that we need very badly today. It will further help revive the image of politi-

cal parties and their leaders among the common people and contribute to the development of a democratic culture in the country."

The News, in an editorial titled "No more lotas (turncoats)," said "The greatest apprehension is that, in the name of strengthening democracy, too much power has been concentrated in the party boss. This may not seem such a bad thing if our po-

litical parties practiced democracy within themselves... It said "the new amendment has diverted power to party leaders — posing a real danger of the legislature becoming a rubber-stamp."

In a critical editorial titled "The price of opinion," The Muslim said, "Democracy has finally divorced reason... under anesthesia, some 280 MPs helplessly watched a constitutional surgery that robbed them of their vocal chords. And though their right of opinion is still intact, the latest constitutional amendment has turned the legislature into a whispering-dome, ill-affording loud thinking. Henceforth, a chosen representative would be free to shorten his tenure from the given five years to merely 23 days. All he needs is to disagree with the boss."

A constitutional expert told LANS that the passage of a motion for vote of no-confidence against a prime minister or chief minister has become almost impossible due to the new law.

Constitutional clauses providing for a vote of confidence and no-trust have been rendered irrelevant, if not non-existent, by the new amendment, he said. The expert said unless the out-of-parliament supreme body of a political party changes its parliamentary leader according to its party constitution, no MP of that party can cast a vote against a prime minister or chief minister. If the MP does so, he or she will be weeded out in the name of the anti-defection law. — India Abroad News Service

## Travellers have rough time getting visa to visit US

WASHINGTON, July 4: Everybody has a story. The Indonesian couple who canceled a US vacation when only the wife got a visa, the Australian barred from the land of the free because he didn't have a job, the Indian woman who needed a lawyer to see her new American grandchild, reports AP.

Getting a tourist or business visa for even a short US visit can be frustrating, sometimes taking months or years if granted at all, especially for travellers coming from developing countries.

It doesn't help if you know someone. The Australian's cousin works for the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service and the Indonesian man's sister works at her embassy in Washington.

"My brother has a job. He's in his 50s. What's he going to do here?" asked Aleida Palenewen, an information officer at the Indonesian Embassy. "He just wanted to see me."

US diplomats gave Pale-

### Strike paralyses West Bengal

NEW DELHI, July 4: A strike denouncing government corruption paralysed the Communist-ruled Indian state of West Bengal today, domestic news agencies said, reports AFP.

Shops, markets and businesses were shut in Calcutta, the bustling state capital, while the state's trains services were badly hit as strikers blocked rail lines.

The protest was called by the Congress (I) Party, the main opposition in West Bengal.

It has accused the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) state government of irregularities in an audit of government funds and has called for the resignation of Finance Minister Ashim Dasgupta.

The CPI-M, which has ruled West Bengal since 1977, denies the charge.

"The strike is a Congress way of trying to malign the CPI-M because we have been so critical of corruption by Congress politicians," said Prakash Karat, a CPI-M leader.

### Clinton can't recall meeting Jones

LITTLE ROCK, Arkansas, July 4: President Bill Clinton responded Thursday to Paula Jones' sexual harassment suit against him, insisting he cannot recall meeting the ex-state employee nor made any sexual advance to her while governor, reports AFP.

Clinton denied all allegations Jones made against him. In court documents filed on the eve of a long independence day holiday weekend, making it likely they would get less attention than usual, television stations reported.

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Argentine archeologist Patricia Bernardi digs around the remains of a body Thursday in Vallegrande, Bolivia. A team of Cuban and Argentine archeologist are excavating an area at Vallegrande's old airport for the remains of the Marxist guerrilla leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara, believed to have been buried at the end of a runway after his execution on October 9, 1967. Guevara was buried with members of his group captured by Bolivian troops. — AFP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY

**Fire claims 19 in Spain:** At least 19 workers were killed and 10 injured Thursday when fire broke out on a boat under construction at naval shipyards in Valencia, southeast Spain, rescue services said, AFP reports from Valencia.

"It looks like an atomic bomb hit," shipyard worker Francisco Diaz said, describing the mushroom-shaped cloud of black smoke sitting over the burning vessel. The fire erupted at 12:15 pm (10:15 GMT) after leaking fuel being fed in caught alight and exploded in the Norwegian ship 'Trof Spirit' at the Levante Naval Shipyard, investigators said.

**Empress Michiko hospitalised:** Empress Michiko was admitted to hospital late on Thursday suffering a high fever and a headache, Japan's imperial household agency said, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Court doctors diagnosed two days ago that the 62-year-old empress had herpes zoster, a form of a virus infection that causes rashes along the nervous system. Michiko complained of a severe headache and high fever late on Thursday afternoon after attending an awards ceremony in Tokyo, the agency said.

**Rebels kill 4 troops in Colombia:** Rebels killed four soldiers Thursday in a guerrilla offensive that has left 20 dead this week, military officials said, AFP reports from Bogota.

The assault on a military outpost near the town of San Carlos also left three wounded and two missing, officials said. There were 28 soldiers stationed at the outpost.

**Chirac, Jospin gain in poll:** French President Jacques Chirac climbed five percentage points in opinion polls and Premier Lionel Jospin picked up three percentage points during the month of June, according to a poll released Thursday, AP reports from Paris.

Of those interviewed, 46 per cent were confident that Chirac could resolve the problems France now faces, according to the latest Sofres poll that will appear in Saturday's Le Figaro magazine.

The figure is up from 41 per cent in the previous poll conducted June 4 to June 6, just after legislative elections put Jospin in power.

**One East Timorese rebel killed:** Indonesian security forces clashed with East Timorese rebels killing one rebel and capturing 13 others, two of whom were badly injured, a senior officer in the territory's capital Dili said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The clash occurred in Kilik in the Baucau regency, some 115 kilometres (70 miles) east of Dili, on Wednesday afternoon, the source, who declined to be identified, told the agency by telephone.

**15 Lankan boat people in Australia:** Fifteen boat people spent three days wandering on the remote Pilbara coast of Western Australia before they were discovered by a motorist, a police spokesman said Friday, AP reports from Perth.

The Sri Lankans, all men, said they had been dropped ashore in the Coral Bay area in the tropical north by a Taiwanese fishing boat and hiked 12 miles (20 kms) inland.

The men were held in custody at Exmouth, 680 miles (1,100 kms) north of Perth, and were to be flown further north to the Port Hedland detention center on Friday, he said.

**2 more die from brain disorder in UK:** Two more people have died from the brain disorder believed to be so-called madcow disease, taking the total in Britain to 18, the Health Ministry said Thursday, AFP reports from London.

One more case has also been diagnosed of the new variant of the fatal creutzfeldt-jakob disease (CJD-NV), but the patient is still alive, the ministry said.

The victims are believed to have been infected by eating beef products contaminated by bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), an epidemic of which in Britain has caused British beef exports to be banned.

**Drought hits Chinese province:** Drought has struck the eastern Chinese province of Shandong, causing shortages of drinking water, the official Xinhua news agency reported Friday, AP says from Beijing.

It said the water shortage was the worst in a century in Shandong, a region of 85 million people where one of the driest years on record has left reservoirs and rivers at extremely low levels.

World Hot Dog eating champion Hirofumi Nakajima of Kofu, Japan (R) has a face-to-face stare down with rival Ed Krachie of the US after their weigh-in Thursday on the eve of their rematch in the 82nd Annual Nathan's International Hot Dog Eating Contest in Coney Island. Nakajima holds the record of 23 and 1/4 hot dogs in 12 minutes. — AFP/UNB photo