

International

BRIEFLY

Algeria paroled ex-Muslim leader:

Algeria paroled the jailed former leader of a Muslim fundamentalist political party Tuesday, a military court said, signaling a possible softening of the government's anti-fundamentalist stance. AP reports from Algiers.

The court ordered the release of Abassi Madani, former leader of the Islamic Salvation Front, a day after the president appointed a new "moderate" national police chief, and a week after Madani's Front successor was released from prison. Madani was sentenced to 12 years in prison in 1992 with another Front leader, Ali Belhadi, for calling a general strike. No reason for Madani's surprise release was given.

Flood death toll reaches 20 in China:

The death toll from floods in China's eastern Zhejiang province has risen to 20, a provincial government official said yesterday. AFP reports from Shanghai.

Gong Wei, a Zhejiang province government information department official said by Monday 20 people had died in the floods which have affected 8.68 million people in 74 counties and cities and 621 towns. The deluge damaged 51,000 houses and flooded 344,172 hectares (850,104 acres) of farmland, Gong said.

2 executed in China:

Deviating from the usual method of shooting those to be executed in the head, authorities in the southwestern Chinese city of Kunming have killed two prisoners by lethal injection, state-run media reported. AP reports from Beijing.

The two prisoners were executed recently on the order of the Kunming Intermediate People's Court, the newspaper Yangcheng Evening News reported. It did not provide details about the crimes of the people executed or say exactly when the executions had taken place. Revisions in China's criminal law, which once only ordained execution by gunshot, took effect January 1, allowing the change in procedure.

Parrot smuggler jailed in US:

A parrot importer who smuggled more than 4,000 protected African gray parrots from Zaire was sentenced Monday to a year in prison and ordered to pay \$300,000 dollars in fines and restitution, AP reports from Miami.

The financial penalty levied against Adolph "Buz" Pare was the largest ever assessed in a federal wildlife smuggling case, prosecutors said. Pare, 63, was accused of falsifying documents to show that he imported the parrots from legitimate captive populations in Guinea and the Ivory Coast, which allow exporting the birds. It is protected in the wild.

Indian wins Ramon Magsaysay Prize:

India's foremost environmental activist, Mahesh Chander Mehta, was awarded the Philippines' Ramon Magsaysay Prize yesterday for his staunch efforts to protect India's environment, AP reports from Manila.

The award, named after a former Philippine president, is one of the top political and diplomatic prizes given in Asia. Mehta is this year's awardee for public service, the award foundation said in a statement. Mehta, 50, has been cited for "claiming for India's present and future citizens their constitutional right to a clean and healthy environment."

Police kill 2 brothers in China:

Thousands of people demonstrated in southern China after a policeman allegedly shot three brothers in a traffic dispute, a Hong Kong newspaper reported yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

Riot police were called to quell the demonstration sparked by the shooting in Guangdong province's Qingyuan City Monday in which two of the brothers were killed and the third seriously wounded, the Chinese-language Oriental Daily News said. Thousands of people carried the two corpses to government offices, the report said. The protesters dispersed without violence after riot police were called, it said.

China's bid to train youths:

Chinese teens who do not attend high school or university will be required to obtain employment certificates certifying they have been given professional training, state-run media reported, AP reports from Beijing.

Each year, 21 million young Chinese begin working without attending high school and without acquiring any professional skills. The new requirement is aimed at improving the quality of China's labour force, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported late Monday. It reflects concern among Chinese leaders that the nation's huge work force will lack the skills needed by fast-growing modern industries. China already is struggling to find jobs for tens of millions of older workers laid off by its restructuring state-run industries.

Hungarian communists' no to NATO:

Four months before a national referendum on joining the Western alliance, Hungary's old-line Communist Party kicked off a campaign on Monday to block the country's NATO membership. AP reports from Budapest.

After last week's NATO summit in Madrid, when Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic were invited to begin accession talks, the government agreed to hold a referendum in November. Gyula Thurmer, the leader of the hard-line Workers' Party, said that his party would demand equal access to the media to state its case and to government funding to finance its campaign. It will hold demonstrations at US bases in Hungary supporting the NATO-led peace force mission in Bosnia, he said.

Protests turn violent in Spain:

Peaceful protests against the killing of a young politician by Basque separatists turned violent in some areas on Monday when supporters and opponents of the guerrilla group ETA clashed, injuring at least two people, Reuters reports from Bilbao, Spain.

In the Basque towns of Bilbao and San Sebastian, pitched battles broke out when demonstrators threw eggs and rocks at offices and bars used by ETA's political wing Herri Batasuna (HB). ETA sympathisers retaliated with Molotov cocktails. Basque police calmed the situation in San Sebastian, but violent clashes continued in Bilbao late into the night.

Tajik govt okays Amnesty Act:

Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov signed a Mutual Forgiveness Act on Monday that forgives all participants in Tajikistan's recent civil war and calls for the release of prisoners of war, AP reports from Dushanbe.

The act, already signed by opposition leader Sayid Abdullo Nuri, was drafted by the new National Reconciliation Commission, which Nuri chairs, the Interfax news agency reported. Rakhmonov and Nuri signed a peace treaty late last month that brought a formal end to five years of civil war in the Central Asian nation.

Militants kill 12 in Algeria:

Muslim extremists killed 12 people overnight Monday in northern Algeria in the latest incident of a wave of violence, a newspaper said yesterday. AFP reports from Algiers.

The two attacks raised the number of civilians killed over the past five days to at least 115, according to unofficial tolls. The newspaper Le Matin said the latest attacks took place in the Medea region south of Algiers.

Columbia to land Thursday:

Space shuttle Columbia headed the end of its 16-day laboratory mission Monday with scientists exhausted but thrilled with all their results, AP reports from Cape Canaveral.

Columbia is due to land at Kennedy Space Centre on Thursday morning. "Where we are in the mission now is very much, again, like the Kentucky Derby," said NASA mission scientist Michael Robinson. "We're in the home stretch, there's no doubt about it."

Hun Sen renews propaganda blitz, 25 killed in custody in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, July 15: Coup leader Hun Sen renewed a propaganda blitz justifying his bloody takeover Tuesday as human rights workers reported that at least 25 people have been killed in custody since he seized power, reports AP.

The bloodletting has followed Hun Sen's power grab July 5 against co-premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh. Fear has prompted opponents and their family members to flee to neighboring Thailand, where those without visas live in terror of being deported.

Hun Sen has tried to justify the coup d'etat, which provoked intense fighting in the capital followed by a looting spree by his soldiers, by accusing his rival of bringing former Khmer Rouge guerrillas into the capital to wage a terror campaign.

On Tuesday, an elaborate press conference was staged at the Interior Ministry when officials presented five young, clean-cut men who claimed to be former Khmer Rouge cadres the prince had planned to use to attack Hun Sen's party.

But reporters noted that the same men had already appeared at three other news conferences over the past few weeks as Hun

Sen tries to paint Ranariddh as an international villain.

One of the men, identified as Phun Pheap, a former Khmer Rouge major, said he had switched sides to Hun Sen before the coup. During the fighting in the capital, which killed at least 70 people, he led an attack against Ranariddh's top general, Nhek Bunchhay, he said.

For his services, Phun Pheap was given a pickup truck and a sprawling house that once belonged to one of Nhek Bunchhay's top commanders.

Hun Sen's officials, meanwhile, were downplaying reports that dissidents and opponents have been rounded up, illegally detained and in some cases summarily executed as numerous human-rights groups have alleged.

"We will only reeducate them to understand the truth," Hun Sen's defense minister, Tea Banh, told reporters. "Nothing will happen to them. They will only be reeducated."

One human rights organization that tried to investigate alleged deaths in custody has said that at least 25 opponents of the new regime have been killed, stressing the figure was a min-

imum.

The group, which asked that it not be identified, said several other killings could not be confirmed.

Some of the deaths have been announced by Hun Sen supporters or reported by newspapers sympathetic to his Cambodian People's Party. They have been described as suicides or actions taken in the heat of the moment by soldiers who could not control their anger.

The first confirmed killing of a prominent Ranariddh supporter was his Interior Ministry Secretary of State, Ho Sok. He died July 7, shot in the head at the ministry, according to several sources.

Only July 8, a pro-Hun Sen spokesman for the Interior Ministry, Khieu Sopheak, admitted that the killing occurred, explaining that he was shot by people who were angry with him.

Exiled opponents of Hun Sen met Monday at a hotel in Bangkok, Thailand, to discuss their next move. The meeting was attended by members of Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party, as well as lawmakers from a pro-Ranariddh faction of the Buddhist Liberal Democratic

party.

AP adds: Cambodia's king Norodom Sihanouk yesterday held the first of a series of meetings with special envoys aiming to try to resolve the crisis gripping his country, reliable sources said.

The king met this morning with French envoy, Claude Martin, sent by French President Jacques Chirac, who was accompanied by French Ambassador Pierre Morel.

The king is currently in Beijing recovering following medical treatment, but has agreed to meet with envoys from France, Japan, the United States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to discuss the turmoil in Cambodia.

His son, first prime minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, has been ousted by his co-premier Hun Sen after two days of street battles which erupted on July 5.

So far the king has kept his distance from the conflict, which has left Hun Sen in control of the capital and much of the country, saying he is powerless to interfere and merely calling on Hun Sen to respect his oaths of office and the constitution.



Fireworks burst out around Eiffel Tower in Paris Monday as part of Bastille Day celebrations. — AFP/UNB photo

Indonesia to have N-plant by early next century

JAKARTA, July 15: Indonesia will have a nuclear power plant to meet growing energy demands by early next century, a senior official has predicted, reports AP.

"We will have a nuclear power plant by the year 2003 or 2005 depending on the agreement between the parliament and the government," said Iyos Subki, director-general of the National Atomic Energy Board. The official Antara news agency Tuesday quoted him as saying Indonesia must consider nuclear energy because its population would expand from about 200 million now to 270 million by 2020.

DPRK accepts ROK proposal for food talks

SEOUL, South Korea, July 15: North Korea on Tuesday accepted a South Korean proposal for new Red Cross talks on additional food aid to the reclusive communist country, which is on the brink of famine, reports AP.

But the North insisted that the two sides meet in Beijing on July 23, rather than holding talks at the border or in the South, the South Korean Red Cross Society said.

The Red Cross said it was studying the North's counter-proposal.

On Saturday, South Korea proposed that Red Cross officials from both Koreas meet either at the border village of Panmunjom or somewhere in the South on July 22.

Suu Kyi's smuggled letters to junta released in Thailand

BANGKOK, July 15: A collection of letters from the party of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi to the ruling junta that were smuggled into Thailand were released here today, reports AP.

The "33 letters to a dictator" document the "dignified response" of the National League for Democracy (NLD) to the junta's efforts to "destroy" the party, Myanmar residents said.

Written to senior general Than Shwe from NLD President Aung Shwe, the letters concern arrests and intimidation of party members, the NLD's appeals for dialogue with the military and an alleged assassination attempt on NLD leaders.

Tin Maung Win, Vice-Chairman of the National Coalition of the Union of Burma (NCUB), described the letters as "one of the most important collection of writings to come out of Myanmar in the last half century."

"These letters were written ... to move the SLORC away from terrorizing the people and towards a meaningful political dialogue."

"After reading them, no government can believe that the pacification that the SLORC is bringing to Myanmar is any more than the peace of the dead and imprisoned," he told reporters.

raeli forces if peace talks with Israel are to be revived.

Later on Monday after a two-hour dinner with International Development Secretary Clare Short, Arafat said peace was still the main objective.

"We have agreed that we have to continue in our efforts, all our efforts, with the peace process," he said.

Short said it was "The position of the British government to get the peace process back on track."

Arafat said he had discussed with Blair "The impasse of the peace talks as a result of the measures taken by Israel."

Diplomats said Britain is preparing to take a more central role on the issue when it takes over the rotating presidency of the European Union in the first half of next year.

Congress demands arrest of Bal Thackeray

MUMBAI, July 15: Congress-led opposition today demanded the arrest of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray under the National Security Act (NSA) for "instigating attacks on the houses of Congress legislative party leaders," reports PTI.

Addressing a press legislature at Vidhan Bhavan, the opposition leaders alleged that Thackeray was the "brain behind the ransacking" of the bungalow of opposition leader in the council Chhagan Bhanu on Sunday. They also blamed Thackeray for the attack on the house of opposition leader in the assembly, Madhukar Pichard.

MPCC President Ranjit Deshmukh said "we will take up the matter with the central government present a memorandum to the union Home Minister Indrajit Gupta, who is expected to arrive here tomorrow, demanding the dismissal of the Sena-BJP government and arrest of Thackeray."

Bosnian Serb leaders slate UN tribunal

SARAJEVO, July 15: Nationalist Serb leaders in Bosnia have sharply condemned a UN tribunal for sentencing the first Serb found guilty of war crimes, reports Reuters.

But western envoys vowed to press on with efforts to bring suspects to account for their deeds in wartime.

Dusan Tadic, convicted of murder, torture and ethnic cleansing, was jailed for 20 years by the UN tribunal in The Netherlands on Monday.

Mexico's ruling party loses congressional majority

MEXICO CITY, July 15: Late returns from Mexico's midterm congressional election show the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party has lost its traditional absolute majority in the lower house of congress, reports AP.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI as it is popularly known by its Spanish initials, remains the single biggest legislative group.

But in the July 6 elections it lost the majority of the congressional seats it has held for the 68 years of its existence.

The Federal Electoral Institute said late Sunday the PRI polled 11.5 million or 39.10 per cent of the votes in the elections

for the Chamber of Deputies.

It was followed by the conservative National Action Party with 7.8 million votes, or 26.61 per cent. In third place was the leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party with 7.5 million votes, or 25.72 per cent.

The Green Party captured 3.81 per cent of votes; the Labour Party 2.58 per cent; the Cardenista Party, 1.12 per cent; the Mexican Democratic Party 0.66 per cent.

Official seat allocations in the 500-member Chamber of Deputies were still unavailable Monday. An Federal Electoral Institute spokesman said final allocations will be made public by August 23, at the latest.

Computer problem still grips Mars Pathfinder mission

PASADENA, Calif., July 15: The Mars Pathfinder mission continued to be plagued by pesky computer problems on Monday, but scientists said they were sure they could overcome them, reports Reuters.

The mission's Deputy Project Manager Brian Muirhead said the computer aboard the Mars Lander Reset itself as scientists were downloading information from it on Sunday night, prematurely ending its communications session with earth. The problem persisted on Monday.

The Lander was handling a number of activities when the reset occurred, Muirhead said, adding it appeared the system thought it was overloaded and reset its programme.

He said that during Monday night's download the computer

would only be asked to do one task at a time in what he called a "serialised approach."

He described the problem as more "frustrating" than a setback to the mission. "If we can fix it, we will. If we can't, we will work around it as we are doing tonight," he said.

The Lander's computer, in its shortened communications session on Sunday, was able to confirm the Mars rover "Sojourner" had positioned itself against a large rock called "Yogi" and deployed its alpha proton x-ray spectrometer against the rock to study its chemical composition.

The computer also relayed picture of the rover nestled up against the rock. "They look very happy together," Muirhead said.

6200 children die yearly in US due to their parents' smoking

CHICAGO, July 15: At least 6,200 children die each year in the United States because of their parents' smoking, killed by such things as lung infections and burns, a study says, reports AP.

"More young children are killed by parental smoking than by all unintentional injuries combined," the researchers said in the July issue of the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine.

In addition, some 5.4 million other youngsters each year survive ailments such as ear infections and asthma that are triggered by their parents' smoking, and these problems cost 4.6 billion dollars annually to treat, the researchers from the University of Wisconsin Medical School in Madison estimated.

The study looked at reports from 1980 to 1996 involving children up to 18, existing research about the risks associated with parental smoking and the costs of treating smoking-related illnesses.

The researchers estimated that the childhood loss of life from parental smoking costs 8.2 billion dollars a year, based partly on how much a child would be expected to earn over a lifetime.

The cost analyses are conservative, because they don't include the cost of work time lost by parents caring for sick youngsters, said Dr Thomas E. Novotny, an epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"All of these illnesses and economic costs are foisted upon children who have had absolutely no choice in the matter," said Novotny, who was not involved with the study.

The researchers said 2,800 of the deaths are due to low birth weight caused by mothers who smoke while pregnant. Low birthweight babies are frail and vulnerable to many ills, including respiratory distress syndrome, bleeding in the brain and blood infections.

About 2,000 of the deaths are attributed to sudden infant death syndrome caused by secondhand tobacco smoke. An additional 1,100 are due to respiratory infection.

About 250 children die of burns from fires caused by cigarettes, matches or lighters. And 14 children die of asthma.

A related study in the July issue of the Archives of General Psychiatry found that women who smoke while pregnant are more likely to give birth to boys who are diagnosed with what

psychiatrists call "conduct disorder."

The disorder is marked by frequent and persistent lying, fire-setting, vandalism, physical cruelty, sexual aggression or stealing that begins much earlier than typical juvenile delinquency and is much more severe.

A team led by Benjamin B. Lahey, a psychiatrist professor at the University of Chicago, studied 177 boys ages 7 to 12 who had been referred to out-patient clinics in Pennsylvania and Georgia for possible conduct disorder.

Among the 42 mothers who reported smoking more than half a pack of cigarettes or more a day during pregnancy, 80 per cent of their sons had conduct disorder. Among the 23 mothers who smoked to up a half a pack a day, 70 per cent of their sons had conduct disorder. And among the 112 moms who didn't smoke while pregnant, about 50 per cent of their sons had conduct disorder.

The researchers figured in other traits that might cause children to develop conduct disorder, such as socioeconomic status, whether a parent had antisocial personality, and poor parenting.



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat (R) shakes hands with British Prime Minister Tony Blair as he leaves 10 Downing Street Monday following a 45-minute meeting. During the meeting, Blair told Arafat that he would give particular attention to how Europe can assist in the Middle East peace process when Britain takes over the EU presidency next year. — AFP/UNB photo

Clinton admn lobbying for Senate ratification of expanded NATO alliance

WASHINGTON, July 15: The Clinton administration is gearing up for a long lobbying campaign to win Senate ratification of an expanded NATO alliance, reports AP.

The just-completed Madrid summit had all the appearance of the final step needed to add Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to the security umbrella of the North Atlantic Treaty. It wasn't.

Sometime in the next year, the Senate is expected to take up the issue and will need to agree to a two-thirds majority — 67 votes — to agree to the expanded alliance. The legislators of NATO's other 15 members must do the same.

Sen Richard Lugar, one of

the leading advocates of an expanded alliance, said Monday that the chief problem with predicting the outcome of the NATO debate is that lawmakers have not focused on the issue.

He believes the final vote will be well over two-thirds of the Senate, the Indiana Republican predicted. "But I think it will not be clear until the weeks preceding that the two-thirds is going to be obtained at all."

Sen Kay Bailey Hutchison, a leading skeptic on the NATO expansion issue, said that with so many lawmakers undecided, the administration must make a strong case to counter arguments that the expanded alliance will be too costly, or risk putting US troops into remote

conflicts in Central Europe.

"I think it's very much up in the air," the Texas Republican said. "I think the president could win it if he appears very clear on what our costs will be. He could lose it if he ignores the questions."

The State Department has established a fulltime committee devoted to the issue of NATO ratification, and Clinton administration officials, beginning later this week, will be coming to Capitol Hill to make the case for an expanded alliance.

The latest indication that ratification of an expanded alliance remains an open question comes from a survey to be released later this week by the Council for a Livable World, a

group that opposes NATO expansion.

Based on interviews with members and an examination of floor votes, op-ed articles and public statements, the survey listed 26 senators as skeptics or potential opponents of NATO expansion and 25 members with either undecided, unstated or contradictory positions. The Council found 48 members either definitely for expansion or leaning in that direction — well short of the 67 needed to ratify an expanded alliance.

"The bottom line is the administration has a lot of convincing to go before they get 67 votes lined up," said John Isaacs, president of the Council for a Livable World.

The Council is a Washington-based arms control group that opposes NATO enlargement in part because it could short-circuit agreements with Russia to reduce or eliminate classes of nuclear weapons.

Sen John Warner was among the most recent to join ranks of the NATO expansion skeptics.

"I am not in favour of the expansion of NATO," the Virginia Republican said during last week's defence budget debate. "There may be a degree to which our tinkering with NATO and changing it in concept could begin to undermine American public support, and I think that would be a terrible loss."

The ratification vote is expected to come some time in

1998.

The NATO issue cuts across party lines. Among the "skeptics" on NATO expansion, there are 14 Republicans and 12 Democrats, according to the Council survey.

NATO expansion has influential supporters, most notably Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. Other supporters of an enlarged alliance are not yet giving their unqualified support.

Sen Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a supporter of NATO expansion, wrote in a recent opinion article that "The Clinton administration has failed to present the Senate with any credible strategic rationale for NATO expansion."

Mandela, Suharto discuss E Timor situation

JAKARTA, July 15: South African President Nelson Mandela and Indonesia's President Suharto on Tuesday discussed East Timor and also agreed to expand economic and trade ties, reports Reuters.

"President Suharto and Foreign Minister Ali Alatas gave an explanation to our guests about the East Timor issue," State Secretary Murtidiono told reporters after talks between Mandela and Suharto which lasted around two hours.

"As a friend, certainly both sides want to help in handling things that are still a hurdle for the other party," Murtidiono said

when asked about the East Timor discussions. Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony of East Timor in 1975 and annexed it the following year. The United Nations still regards Lisbon as the territory's administering power.

"Both sides also agreed they need to expand economic and trade ties between the two countries. Therefore, there is a need to encourage the private sectors," he said.

"Both sides also agreed to set up a joint commission, at level of senior officials aimed at boosting trade," he said.