

BRIEFLY

Algeria paroles 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 Belhadj, 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 Wee, 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 countries 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 "Buzy" 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 Price 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.

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 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 some 23 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 Thuermer, the leader of the hard-line Workers' Party, said that his party would demand equal access to the media, 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. Reuter 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 sympathizers 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 Abdul 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 neared 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."

Clinton admin 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, 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.

"I believe 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 costly, or risk putting US troops into remote

International

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'état, 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 Phum 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 Bunhachay.

For his services, Phum Pheap was given a pickup truck and a sprawling house that once belonged to one of Nhek Bunhachay'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 minimum.

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 Minister 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, Khuie Sophak, 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.

APP 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 Ilyas 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 AFP.

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.

Arafat thanks Britain for backing ME peace

LONDON, July 15: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Monday thanked Britain for its moral and political support in backing efforts to move the Middle East peace process out of what he described as its current "impasse," reports Reuter.

Speaking after a 50-minute meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair at his London office, Arafat told reporters: "I thanked him for what he is doing with all his capability to protect the peace process."

British diplomatic Mission said Blair and Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett who held an earlier meeting with Arafat had backed his call for a halt to Jewish settlement in the occupied territories.

But they had told the Palestine leader he must resume full security cooperation with Israel.

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 legislature party leaders," reports PTI.

Addressing a press legislature at Vidhan Bhawan, the opposition leaders alleged that Thackeray was the "brain behind the ransacking" of the bungalow of opposition leader in the council Chhagan Bhujbal 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, demanding the dismissal of the Sena-BJP government and arrest of Thackeray.

But western envoys vowed to press on with efforts to bring suspects to account for their war crimes.

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

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.

A team led by Benjamin B Lahey, a psychiatry 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 112 mothers who didn't smoke while pregnant, 40 per cent of their sons had conduct disorder.

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.

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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.

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 Mardiono told reporters after talks between Mandela and Suharto which lasted around two hours.

"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