



Prime Minister of Nepal Lokendra Bahadur Chand signing the condolence book on late president Justice Sayeem at the Bangladesh embassy in Katmandu recently. Seen standing (from right) are Bangladesh Ambassador to Nepal Mohiuddin Ahmed and Counsellor Farooq Amin.

FIS leader freed in Algeria

PARIS, July 16: Against a background of constant bloodshed, the Algerian government freed Abassi Madani leader of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), in a move seen as reflecting the authorities' confidence ahead of new local elections, reports Reuters.

Diplomats said they did not expect Madani's release to end the violence, questioning how much sway he had with armed Muslim fundamentalists whom officials blame for the killings. But it could help forge consensus with the legal opposition and cut some of the ground from under hardline Islamists. It also showed the authorities' confidence in pursuing a path of political reform decided by president Liamine Zeroual, they said.

The outlawed FIS leadership in Europe said the move was a "definite and effective contribution to solving the crisis and returning to peace and stability" in the country where 60,000 people have died in nearly six years of conflict.

Algeria last month completed its first multi-party general elections since one dominated by the FIS in December 1991 was cancelled in January

1992, sparking an outbreak of violence.

The outlawed FIS was barred from running but two moderate Islamist parties were allowed to compete and seven members of one have since joined the coalition government.

Hours after Madani walked to freedom on Tuesday after serving less than half his 12-year jail term. Zeroual met party leaders to discuss a date for local elections promised this year.

This ballot is seen as final step in rebuilding Algeria's state institutions. In an editorial on Tuesday perhaps foreshadowing Madani's release, the government newspaper El Moudjahid said Zeroual "needs the total support of the political class and all Algerians" in his objective of "rebuilding the country and ending the cycle of violence for which Algerian society is paying a high price."

Only hours before the FIS chief's release, a bomb killed at least 21 people and wounded scores in Algiers and influential newspapers reported further massacres over the weekend and on Monday night in which around 60 people died.

UNGA votes to condemn Israel for housing project

UNITED NATIONS, July 16: For the third time, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to condemn Israel for a Jewish housing project in Jerusalem but refrained from endorsing Arab calls for economic sanctions, reports AP.

Instead, the resolution urged member states to "discourage" activities that contribute to Israeli settlements. Most Asian countries supported the resolution, which Indonesia and Malaysia helped sponsor. Japan voted for it although Japanese Ambassador Hisashi Owada said Tokyo had some misgivings about parts of the text.

The resolution, introduced by Arab and Muslim countries, also recommends convening a conference to enforce international rules on protecting civilians in wartime as they pertain to Palestinians in Israeli-occupied territories.

It stressed that member states should "fulfil in good faith their obligations" under

the UN Charter "to ensure their rights and benefits", which may be a veiled threat to curb Israel's UN membership.

The vote on the non-binding resolution was 131-3 with 14 abstentions. In April, a weaker resolution against the 6,500-unit Har Homa project passed by a 134-3 vote with 11 abstentions.

The United States has voted against the resolution each of the three times. Advocates of the resolution seek "to prove that no country is above international law," Palestinian delegate Nasser al-Kidwa said. "The time is approaching when Israel will have to decide whether it is a member of the family of nations or outside that family."

But Israel's new ambassador, Dore Gold, accused the Palestinians of reneging on their commitments under the peace process and denounced the United Nations for allegedly favouring the Arab side.

Let no member of this assembly delude themselves that

this session will in any way advance prospects for peace in our region," Gold said.

The resolution urges member states to "actively discourage activities which directly contribute to any construction or development of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem."

The first draft recommended a ban on importing goods produced in disputed areas, including Jerusalem. But the sponsors removed that from the final draft in hopes of winning more support. Instead, the resolution demanded that Israel identify goods produced in those areas.

US Ambassador Bill Richardson said such measures "amount to a demand for a partial economic boycott of Israel" and run "contrary to a basic building block of the peace process — the pledges of the negotiating parties to build economic ties as a means of advancing the process."

In March, the United States used its Security Council veto

twice to block resolutions against the project. After those vetoes, the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to condemn the project.

Last month, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the Har Homa project poses a serious threat to Arab-Israeli peace-making. In a report, Annan said the Har Homa project "is seen as the final step toward the isolation of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank."

He said the project was widely interpreted to be part of Israel's plan "of fully incorporating East Jerusalem as part of the unified, eternal capital of the State of Israel."

Gold denounced the UN report as "hostile and one-sided" and complained that it was based on information from UN agencies that are supposed to be performing humanitarian work.

Israel and the Palestinians broke off relations in March and have not resumed them, chiefly because of the Har Homa project.

Queen Elizabeth celebrates 50th wedding anniversary

LONDON, July 16: Four thousand couples gathered on the Buckingham Palace lawn Tuesday to help Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip celebrate the year of their 50th wedding anniversary, reports AFP.

The 4,000 couples were chosen by lottery from more than 40,000 who, like the royal couple, wed in 1947 and who requested invitations to the afternoon tea party out.

After singing the British national anthem "God Save The Queen" one woman, Joan Woodford from Cardiff, shouted: "We'll see you in another 50 years time."

Senate urges Clinton to avoid new military missions in Bosnia

WASHINGTON, July 16: The US Senate on Tuesday urged President Bill Clinton to avoid new military missions in Bosnia and especially the use of US forces to arrest suspected war criminals, reports AFP.

"We all want these perpetrators of murder and rape to come to justice," Senator Kay Hutchinson said. "But American troops would be singled out for retaliation if US forces are part of these arrest efforts."

The Senate added an amendment to the Defence Department budget calling on Clinton to consult Congress before taking any new steps in Bosnia, including police action.

Hutchinson, who sponsored the amendment, said the United States paid a heavy price in Somalia when police action there led to the deaths of 18 US soldiers.

The Senate passed the measure on the same day that Clinton denounced the backlash by Bosnian Serb leaders against last week's crackdown in Bosnia.

In the first operation of its kind, elite British troops operating under the auspices of the NATO peacekeeping force known as SFOR swooped down on two suspected war criminals in the northwestern town of Prijedor on Thursday.

2 gunmen shot dead in Pak Punjab

LAHORE, Pakistan, July 16: Two men armed with automatic rifles shot and killed two people early Wednesday in what police say was a religiously motivated shooting, reports AP.

The victims, both shopkeepers on the outskirts of the Punjab provincial capital, died immediately outside their shop. Another three people were wounded, police said.

Both men, who policemen have refused to identify, were known activists with the militant Sunni organisation, Guardians of the Friends of the Prophet.

In recent months as many as 150 people have died in bitter feuding between militant Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Pakistan.

Police officials in the eastern Punjab province, where most of the killings have occurred, have launched a sweeping crackdown on militants, arresting more than 500 from both Islamic sets.

Rebels attack Israeli positions in S Lebanon

TYRE, Lebanon, July 16: Guerillas fired rockets and mortars at Israeli positions in southern Lebanon on Wednesday, officials said, reports AP.

Several shells landed in northern Israel, but Israeli army radio said they caused no damage or injuries. Earlier cross-border attacks from Lebanon into Israel have provoked major Israeli retaliation.

Lebanese security officials said 37 rockets were fired at the Israeli-occupied enclave in south Lebanon in the worst such attack in 15 months.

The rocket barrages targeted Israeli military positions inside Lebanon abutting the international border, said the officials, speaking on customary condition of anonymity.

Russia supports EU membership for Baltics

MOSCOW, July 16: Russia still opposes NATO membership for the former Soviet republics in the Baltics, but has no objections to them joining the European Union, the Foreign Ministry said Tuesday, reports AP.

"Although Russia is not a member of the European Union, it has no objections," Foreign Minister spokesman Gennady Tarasov said, according to the ITAR-Tass news agency. He said Russia would support Baltic membership in the EU.

The three Baltic nations — Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia — are eager to join both NATO and the EU. Russia has repeatedly stressed its strong objections to NATO expansion into former Soviet republics, threatening to cancel its partnership agreement with the Western alliance if the Baltic nations are invited.



South Korean fishermen burn an effigy of Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto and Japanese flag during an anti-Japanese demonstration at a fishing village Tongyong in South Korea, some 400 km south of Seoul, Wednesday. Some 1,000 South Korean fishermen protested against the capture of South Korean fishing boats by Japanese maritime police allegedly for violating the sea baseline unilaterally declared by Tokyo.

— AFP/UNB photo

67 die as boat sinks in Nigeria

LAGOS, July 16: Sixty-seven people died when an overloaded boat sank off the coast of Nigeria, witnesses said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The boat was heading for Calabar from Malabo in Equatorial Guinea when it sank after experiencing problems in the engine room, survivors said.

There were 78 people on board when the boat went down at the beginning of July, one survivor told AFP.

There has been no official confirmation of the accident. The independent Daily Concord reported Tuesday the boat sank after being rammed by an equatorial Guinea coastguard vessel which tried to halt it to check its cargo.

40 Cambodians feared killed for political reasons

PHNOM PENH, July 16: As many as 40 Cambodians may have been killed for political reasons in the wake of this month's overthrow of First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, a diplomatic source said today, reports Reuters.

The source, who declined to be identified, said there was evidence some victims had been tortured, including four bodyguards of Ranariddh's top military commander, General Nhiek Bun Chhay, who were found with their eyes gouged out.

"It doesn't seem to be human," the source said of the human rights situation since Second Prime Minister Hun Sen's coup

against his co-premier and coalition partner Ranariddh. "There seem to have been 40 deaths that one could say with relative safety were politically motivated," the source said.

While attacks on officials from Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC Party appeared to be going on across the country, the figure of 40 deaths had been compiled mostly from incidents in the Phnom Penh area although it was not clear if the killings were part of a planned purge, he said.

"It's very unclear if this is a centrally orchestrated, carefully planned purge or more dispersed — a general uncoordinated attack on FUNCINPEC officials," he said.

Saddam celebrates 29th anniversary of revolution

DUBAI, July 16: Unbowed by international scorn and a UN embargo which he is out to perforce, president Saddam Hussein celebrated on Thursday the 29th anniversary of a revolution which brought his Baath Party to power, reports AFP.

His hold on power is unchallenged as he prepares to address the nation on the anniversary of the July 17, 1968 revolution. Saddam, 60, has survived two disastrous wars, countless assassination plots, and the 1995 defection of his son-in-law Hussein Kamel who split Iraq's military secrets.

But the UN sanctions in force since the 1990 invasion of Kuwait have cut Iraq's military power to size. The oil embargo can not be lifted until all its weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles have been eliminated.

Iraq has at times rebelled against UN arms inspections and counted on France and Russia within the Security Council to lift the crippling

sanctions, but so far to no avail. In dire straits, Saddam finally agreed to UN supervision of an oil-for-food accord which allowed Iraq to resume limited crude exports in December to finance imports of humanitarian goods.

But at the same time, the Iraqi leader is turning toward his neighbours to beat the sanctions. Trade links with enemy Syria were restored in May, the next month Turkey legitimized commerce with Iraq, and operators of how wooden boats in the Gulf are also playing a key role in easing the stranglehold.

From within the walls of his numerous palaces, protected by his clan, Saddam Hussein has emerged the victor of the 1968 revolution.

When President Abdel Rahman Aref was toppled on July 17, Saddam was only 31 years old and the no-2 in the Baath Party, which had to form an alliance with a faction of army

officers to pull off the coup. Within two weeks, the officers were swept aside and Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr took over as president.

Saddam, as his second-in-command, gradually took charge of most of the reins of power and consolidated the Baath's hold by ordering purges and hangings in public squares.

He formed an alliance with the former Soviet Union and nationalized the Iraq Petroleum Company, which was a consortium of western oil firms.

Confronted with an Iranian-backed Kurdish rebellion in the north, he conceded half of the Shatt-Al-Arab waterway which flows into the Gulf to the Shah of Iran under a 1975 treaty signed in Algiers.

Just over a year later, Iraq went to war with the new Islamic Republic of Iran. It took eight more years before Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini accepted a UN-brokered ceasefire.

With the state coffers empty in what was one of the Middle East's wealthiest countries because of huge oil reserves, Saddam pressured Gulf Arab monarchies to pay up for his defence of the region against Khomeneis.

Faced with a stubborn Kuwait refusal to foot the bill for the 1980-1988 conflict and Iraq's post-war reconstruction, Saddam sent his tanks rolling into the tiny but rich emirate on August 2, 1990.

A US-led multinational coalition evicted Iraqi forces in February 1991 in a six-week Gulf War. The UN sanctions have stayed in place but without bringing down a regime which is entering its 30th year in power.

Revival of ME peace process Arafat repeats plea for European intervention

VIENNA, July 15: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat held talks with Austrian Chancellor Viktor Klima on Tuesday and repeated his plea for European intervention to breathe life into the Middle East peace process, reports Reuters.

"We are facing some troubles and I am looking to (Viktor Klima), to Europe, to the international community to protect the peace process, we are in need of help," Arafat told reporters after a 90-minute meeting with Klima.

"The European Union should more and more push its role in the peace process. We have reached a stalemate."

Formal negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel have been frozen since March when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government began building a Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

Arafat's stopover in Vienna followed a two-day visit to London, where he met British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Britain and Austria will both hold the European Union's six-month rotating presidency next year.

Earlier in a speech in London to academics and politicians, Arafat called on Europe to use economic sanctions to prevent Israel building new settlements in occupied territories.

"Seventy per cent of the economy of Israel is with European countries and this card has not been used until now. You only have to wave this economic card and they will listen to you directly," Arafat said.

Klima assured Arafat that Austria would do its utmost to move the Middle East peace process forward.

He also promised his country's backing for a Palestinian resolution urging the United Nations to take action against Israel for refusing to halt construction of settlements.

As you know, Austria has condemned the Israeli acts and, as you know, Austria supports the Palestinians' General Assembly resolution," Klima said.

Sojourner back on track

PASADENA, Calif., July 16: The little Mars space buggy Sojourner was back on track on Tuesday after being hit by a series of computer glitches that gave it the weekend off, reports Reuters.

"It was an excellent day for Mars," said Pathfinder project scientist Matthew Golombek. "The rover did a great job."

Mars, like Earth, might have foggy mornings, one of the project's scientists said. Adding to the evidence that the red planet contains water and could have given birth to primitive forms of life billions of years ago.

Scientists excitedly discussed the rover's latest rock analysis, on a boulder dubbed "Yogi". Saying it proved more like an Earth rock than the previously analysed "Barnacle

Bill."

At a media briefing at the jet propulsion laboratory here, James Greenwood, a mineralogist from the University of Tennessee and a member of the Pathfinder Science Team, said "Yogi" was "more Earth-like than we expected to find" and appeared to be older than "Barnacle Bill".

Greenwood said "Yogi" contained more magnesium than "Barnacle Bill", adding, "generally that means it is the more primitive of the two rocks."

Golombek said the computer problems that "bedeviled" the mission late last week and over the weekend, had "impacted us severely", putting the Sojourner several days behind in its rock sampling tasks.

Off the Record

Good news for men

KOCHI: In a rare case of microvascular reconstructive surgery, a 30-year-old man who had suffered complete loss of his penis 20 years ago in an accident was provided with a 'neo penis' constructed from his own tissues at the Medical Trust Hospital in the city recently, reports PTI.

Dr Ashok Kaul, chief plastic surgeon who performed the delicate operation which lasted for a total of 12 hours in two stages told PTI that in an accident the penis of the patient had been cut off from the very base itself and the victim had just an opening for passing urine.

However he had a normal pair of testes, normal hormonal flows and normal sexual urges of a youth but the life was extremely embarrassing and difficult for the youth without the vital sexual organ, Dr Kaul said.

The surgeon used a sheet of the patient's forearm skin along with one major artery, one vein and two nerves to reconstruct the lost penis. The forearm has two major arteries supplying blood to the hand, one of which can be safely sacrificed.

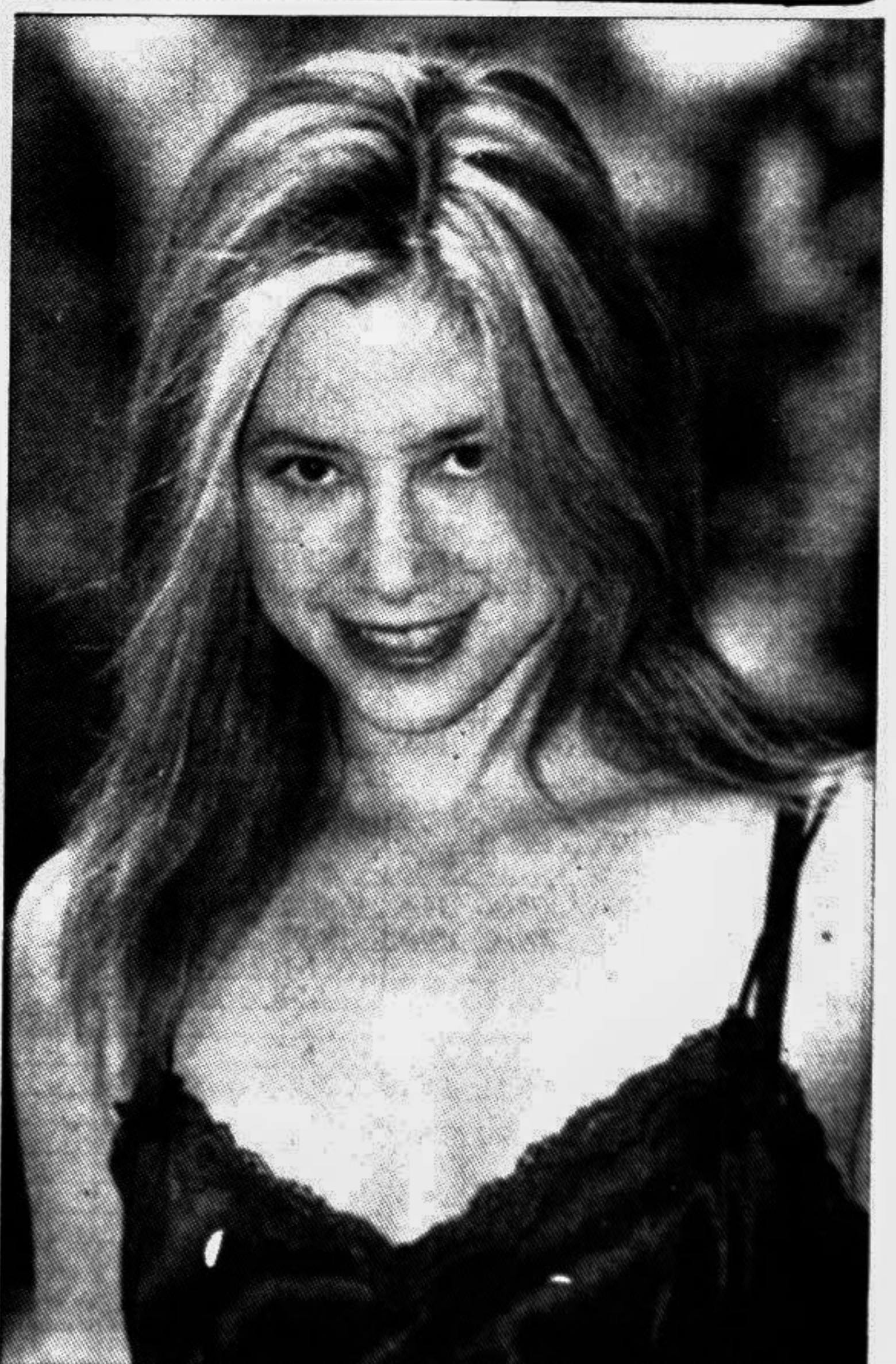
Female condom!

HARARE: Women in Zimbabwe, where aids and unwanted pregnancies are rife, have taken to the female condom with alacrity, the official Ziana news agency reported Tuesday, says AFP.

In just three weeks 40,000 female condoms have been sold — beating sales over an entire year in South Africa, Bolivia and Zambia, according to population services international, which promotes them.

Local media regularly report complaints by women that Zimbabwean men refuse to use male condoms — either because they say it detracts from sexual pleasure or because they want traditionally big families.

The female condoms, which now give women some control over their health and reproduction, are sold in Zimbabwe at the equivalent of 27 US cents for two.



Actress Mira Sorvino arrives at the premiere of Jackie Chan's new movie, "Operation Condor" Tuesday at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee protested the violent, unscrupulous and irrational portrayal of Arabs in the movie as stereotypical. The movie is released by Miramax, a subsidiary of Disney, which drew protests for its portrayal of Arabs in the film, "Aladdin".

— AFP/UNB photo