

Pol Pot confesses guilt, pleads for mercy

HONG KONG, July 31: Former Khmer Rouge supreme Pol Pot, held responsible for up to two million Cambodians' deaths, confessed before his show trial, burst into tears and pleaded for mercy, a senior guerrilla commander was quoted today as saying, reports AFP.

Pol Pot, the man behind Cambodia's "killing fields" in the mid-1970s, acknowledged his guilt and begged for his life, said General Im Nguon.

"Pol Pot did himself confess to me clearly, after his arrest," Im Nguon was quoted as saying in the Far Eastern Economic Review.

"When I met him the first time, he embraced me and burst into tears and said: It is the right thing comrade that this has happened."

"I am wrong comrade, all the mistakes were made by me along," the grey haired and feeble looking 69-year-old was quoted as saying.

"Pol Pot told me that this is the end of his life, there is nothing left, but he begged me to allow him to live," Im Nguon said.

Nobody at the show trial in the Khmer Rouge-controlled jungle of northern Cambodia, was allowed to carry a gun.

Pol Pot, and three generals who remained loyal to him, were tried in the rebels' jungle base of Anlong Veng for the murder of long serving Khmer Rouge Defence Minister Son Sen and 14 members of his family, the report said. The generals were also sentenced to life imprisonment, it added.

Massood hopeful of having control of Kabul soon

GULBAHAR, Afghanistan, July 31: At his headquarters north of Afghanistan's beleaguered capital, opposition leader Ahmed Shah Massood predicted Wednesday that his soldiers would wrest control of Kabul from its Taliban rulers within one week, reports AP.

"If the situation continues as it is... they (Taliban) can't last more than one week," Massood said in an Associated Press Television interview some 60 kilometres (36 miles) north of Kabul.

In barely two weeks Massood's troops have punched through successive Taliban defences and now are on the doorstep of Kabul, barely 15 kilometres (9 miles) from the northern suburb of Khairkhana.

The Taliban army has called its substantial territorial losses in the last two weeks "tactical retreats".

Massood's advance on Kabul, however, appeared to stall last Thursday and since then there has been no significant gains or losses on either side of the conflict.

Occasionally opposition rockets hit Kabul's combined military and civilian airport and the city's 1 million people wait and wonder whether there will be an all out assault on the capital.

Massood said he didn't want to attack Kabul and offered to negotiate a peace settlement with his Taliban enemies. But first the Taliban have to evacuate Kabul, he said.

The opposition coalition battling the Taliban religious army on several fronts is demanding Kabul be demilitarised.

Cabinet decides to suspend peace talks with PA Israel blocks Gaza, West Bank after suicide bombing

JERUSALEM, July 31: Israel blocked Gaza and the autonomous West Bank towns after a twin suicide bombing by Islamic militants killed at least 15 people and wounded more than 150. The attack dealt the hobbled Israeli-Palestinian peace process a devastating blow, reports AP.

Throughout the Palestinian areas, leaders of the Islamic militant Hamas movement were preparing for a massive overnight arrest sweep by Arafat's forces early Thursday.

A leaflet claiming to be from Hamas took responsibility for the attack.

In Jerusalem, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet decided to suspend peace talks with the Palestinians — which had only this week resumed after a four-month crisis — until Arafat crushes the militants.

Netanyahu spokesman Shai Bazak said the government decided on "A series of security measures against the Palestinian terror organisations," but would not elaborate.

One senior Israeli official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the options included commando strikes or limited military incursions into Palestinian-controlled areas.

For now the attackers — whose overall aim has been to achieve a short-term goal: US President Bill Clinton postponed a new initiative by envoy Dennis Ross, who was to arrive in the region Thursday. No new date for the trip was set.

Reports said the two bombers apparently drove to the Mahane Yehuda market together in black coats with



Palestinian workers cross border between Gaza Strip and Israel Wednesday, on their way home after Israeli authorities sealed the West Bank and Gaza Strip and ordered some 65,000 Palestinian labourers working in Israel to return home. The closure came after a double suicide bombing that killed 14 people, including two suicide bombers, in a Jerusalem marketplace, Wednesday.

white shirts and ties — perhaps in an effort to look like ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Each carried a briefcase packed with 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of explosives, police said. They set them off some 50 metres (yards) apart at 1:15 pm.

"People flew in the air without legs, without arms, without clothes," said Sarah Yamin, 43, a turquoise makeup striking her cheeks.

Soot-covered bodies lay on the ground, their blood mixing with smashed watermelons, torn clothes and shredded newspaper on the gray asphalt. Green awnings covering the alley were torn apart and vegetable stands and clothing displays overturned, scraps of clothing hanging from telephone lines.

Dozens of Israelis gathered near the site of the attack shouting, "What kind of peace is this? Who needs this peace?"

Dozens of ambulances lined up along Jaffa Road, one of Jerusalem's busiest streets, to carry away the dead and injured. A 14-year-old boy was seen with a badly mangled leg. Half a corpse, ripped apart by the force of the blast, lay covered with a blanket — apparently one of the bombers.

Israeli TV said that beside the two suicide bombers, eight men and four women were killed. Authorities said early Thursday that one more civilian had died, bringing the toll to 15.

The market has been the site of a dozen bombings and attempted bombings since the 1960s, but the latest assault was the deadliest.

NASA astronomers find youngest galaxy

WASHINGTON, July 31: Astronomers have discovered the youngest and most distant galaxy in the universe some 13 billion light years from earth and with some of the brightest stars ever found, NASA said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The galaxy was created less than one billion years after the birth of the universe in the "big bang," one of two theories of how our solar system was produced.

Astronomers found the new galaxy by using both the Hubble Space Telescope and the Keck Telescopes in Mauna Kea, Hawaii. It is composed of bright knots of huge stars 10 times more brilliant than the Milky Way and among the brightest in the universe, astronomers said.

"We are fascinated to be witnessing the very early stages of the construction of what would well become a massive galaxy like our own Milky Way," said Garth Illingworth of the University of California, Santa Cruz.

"This object is a Pathfinder for deciphering what is happening in young galaxies and offers a rare glimpse of the powerful events that transpired during the formation of galaxies," Illingworth said.

The National Space and Aeronautics Administration (NASA) said in a communique that the galaxy was so far away from earth it might have remained invisible even to the powerful Hubble and Keck Telescopes.

But because of a rare alignment of the galaxy in the foreground of a cluster of massive galaxies some five billion light years from earth.

Astronomers got a view magnified up to 10 times higher than that provided by the Hubble Telescope alone, NASA said.

The remoteness of the galaxy was confirmed with observations made by the Twin Keck Telescopes in Hawaii.

"Based on this image we can begin to make some conclusions about the early growth of galaxies," said Illingworth, "the knots show that starbirth happens in very tiny regions compared with the size of the final galaxy."

20 feared dead as landslide hits Australia

THREDBO, Australia, July 31: The desperate voices of victims trapped in a landslide began to fade Thursday while frustrated rescuers, unable to move their equipment in, could only look on, reports AP.

The landslide struck at 11:40 pm Wednesday and smashed through two ski lodges, burying 20 people under tons of rubble. Ten hours later, crushed cars were perched precariously on teetering piles of rubble.

"The situation is extremely dangerous up there. We've got a lot of rescue personnel at the scene but it is unstable that it is not possible for us to put people right down in there," Police Superintendent Charlie Sanderson said.

He expected many deaths at Thredbo, a popular resort in New South Wales about 185 miles (300 kms) south of Sydney. Thredbo Village has a winter population of about 2,000.

The New South Wales government rushed thermal body-imaging and earth-moving equipment to the site. A geophysicist was being flown in by helicopter to advise rescue teams on how to operate safely.

BRIEFLY

14 executed in China: Fourteen drug smugglers were executed by gunshot in south China after an anti-drugs rally attended by 10,000 people who swore with fists raised not to take drugs, an official newspaper said, AP reports from Beijing.

Government leaders who attended Tuesday's rally at a sports complex in Guangzhou (Canton) called on the crowd to launch "a people's war to surround and annihilate the drugs menace", the Yangcheng Evening News reported. "The crowd of 10,000 raised their fists together and solemnly swore to stay away from drugs, not to smoke drugs, not to peddle drugs," the newspaper said in its Wednesday edition, seen Thursday in Beijing.

Road mishap claims 19 in Nepal: At least 19 persons were killed and 27 others injured when a jeep collided with a bus Wednesday afternoon in Chitwan district in southern Nepal, local press reported yesterday. Xinhua says from Kathmandu.

After the collision the bus fell down the road, the reports said. All the injured are undergoing treatment in hospitals. The cause of the accident is not known yet.

2 die as train overturns in Mexico: Two locomotives maneuvering to turn around in nearby Morelos state crashed and overturned, killing two crewmen and injuring three more, authorities said, AP reports from Mexico City.

Mexican National Railways said the accident occurred around 11:40 am Wednesday at a steep rail service stop high up in the mountains, near a small town known as Three Peaks, some 20 miles (30 kilometers) north of the state capital of Cuernavaca. Red Cross spokesman Carlos Alquizar in Cuernavaca said the two dead trainmen and three other crew members were evacuated to a nearby first aid center. National Railways said in a news release it is investigating the cause of the accident.

Car bomb attack kills 4 in Algiers: Four people were killed Wednesday night in the hills above Algiers when a car bomb went off in front of a bar in the residential El-Biar neighbourhood, security services said, AFP reports from Algiers.

Twenty-five others were injured, they added. The blast happened on Boulevard Bourara. Witnesses at the scene had told AFP that at least six people had been killed.

17 Alps climbers die in France: Drawn by deceptively sunny summer weather, at least 17 people have died in climbing accidents in the snow-covered Alps since the weekend, French authorities said Wednesday, AP reports from Paris.

Those killed included climbers from France, the United States and Austria. Two other climbers, one from the Netherlands and one from Britain, died three weeks ago but their bodies were first spotted Wednesday by a helicopter rescue team, said police spokesman Pierre Faussurier. The warm summer weather and blue skies always draw thousands of tourists, hikers and climbers to the Alps, leading each year to fatalities in the snowy conditions of Alpine summer.

Drought hits Chinese provinces: The autumn grain output in northeast China's Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces is now threatened by a sustained drought this summer, Xinhua reports from Beijing.

According to yesterday's China Daily, some local rivers in the three provinces have dried up for more than 40 days due to this summer's long dry and hot weather there — the worst during the past 15 years.

NATO official pledges all war crimes suspects will be caught

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, July 31: Upping the pressure on war crimes suspects, NATO's secretary-general pledged Wednesday they all will be behind bars before the international community leaves Bosnia, reports AP.

The comments by Javier Solana were the latest in a series of warnings from international officials of a tough, new approach to nabbing suspects. It started with raids against two Serb suspects by British soldiers on July 10.

One, Milan Kovacevic, was captured and pleaded innocent Wednesday to genocide charges before an international tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands. The second, Simo Drljaca, was killed resisting arrest.

There are 77 publicly indicted suspects, but an untold number have been indicted secretly, as well.

Solana refused to say specifically whether more raids were planned, but pledged: "Before the international community leaves Bosnia, the war

criminals with be where they should be — sitting in front of the tribunal."

The No. 1 suspect is Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic. A close associate of Karadzic said in an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday in Pale, the Serb headquarters just east of Sarajevo, that war crimes investigators were free to come and interview Karadzic.

The official, Momcilo Krajcinik, claimed such interviews would clear Karadzic, and by extension, remove a presumption of collective Serb guilt.

Solana did not give a deadline for suspects to be sent to the tribunal, but the NATO-led peace mission is scheduled to end next summer. There has been talk about extending it, but no decision has been reached.

Western officials believe that leaving war crimes suspects like Karadzic loose after NATO leaves would destroy any chances for putting Bosnia back together.

Fish oil lowers breast cancer risk

BOSTON, July 31: A group of American women who took fish oil capsules for just three months experienced changes in breast tissue that may lower their risk of breast cancer, researchers say, reports AP.

In an experiment at UCLA's Jonsson Cancer Centre, 25 US women were put on a diet that mimics foods, including fish oil, eaten by Asian women who have a much lower rate of breast cancer than American women.

The results, said Dr. John Glaspy, suggests that the typical American diet, with its high content of vegetable and animal fat, may increase the risk of breast cancer, and that fish oil can quickly change the risk.

Glaspy cautioned that the study does not prove that a diet rich in fish oil would prevent breast cancer. A larger, longer study would be required for that, he said.

The study is to be published next week in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

Court prohibits foreign universities from operating in India

NEW DELHI, July 31: An Indian court has prohibited foreign universities from conducting classes, collecting fees and awarding degrees in India, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported today, reports AFP.

The High Court in the southern city of Madras on Wednesday asked the Federal Government and University Grants Commission (UGC) not to permit foreign universities to operate in India directly or indirectly.

The government-run UGC funds Indian universities.

The court order followed a petition alleging that foreign universities violated Indian laws by operating in the country through local institutions.

Launch development efforts for 21st century, Jiang urges PLA

BEIJING, July 31: Chinese President Jiang Zemin called today on the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to launch a "full-scale" military development efforts for the 21st century, reports AFP.

Speaking to a rally here on the 70th anniversary of the world's largest standing army, Jiang, stressed that a stronger, more powerful military was crucial to ensure national security and regional stability.

The rally was held in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Top military commanders from across the country, the entire Politburo Standing Committee, attended the event.

"Fulfilling our great targets and undertakings related to safeguarding China's unity and

security, while at the same time promoting world peace and stability requires us to build a powerful army and consolidate national defence," Jiang said.

He also urged the armed forces to be fully alert to changes in both the domestic and international situation, to strengthen their sense of responsibility and mission, and to "launch a full-scale military development effort."

The PLA has almost three million troops and China's military modernisation programme has already caused murmurs of concern among its Asian neighbours, despite Beijing's repeated assurances that its armed forces will only act in self-defence.



Investors who lost money in a financial scandal clap from the balcony of the National Assembly chamber in San Salvador, El Salvador, Wednesday. Dozens of protesters showed up at the session of the one-chamber congress to hear arguments on freezing assets of those implicated in the fraud.



A Singapore police coast guard boat passes under the second crossing bridge which linked between Singapore and Malaysia Thursday, during a topping-off ceremony officiated jointly by Singapore Minister of National Development, Lim Hong Kiang and Malaysia's Minister of Works, Samy Velu.

Fate of thousands of Asians hangs in the balance in US

Ela Dutt writes from Washington

Hundreds of thousands of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis may never get legal status in the United States if a three year old law is not extended.

Anecdotal reports of a spurt in marriages to American citizens are rife as frantic illegals try to make themselves legal before the October 1 deadline.

According to the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS), there are five million illegal immigrants in the country as of October 1996. Of them 33,000 are Indians and 41,000 Pakistanis. The fate of many of them hangs in the balance if Congress does not extend the three year experiment. Observers and experts believe it will not extend the law that allowed illegals to change their status by simply paying a penalty.

Three years ago the INS began a three-year experimental programme (Section 245 (i) of the Immigration and Naturalisation Act) by which all those who were illegal could apply for citizenship by just paying a penalty of 1,000 dollars instead of going back to their country and approaching the US con-

sulates there.

But, starting from April 1, 1996, if a person had been in this country for 180 days illegally and went abroad, he was barred from re-entering the US for three years. And if a person was staying illegally for one year and went abroad, he was ineligible to come back for ten years. The INS agrees this new law has put the future of millions of illegals in doubt. Conservative immigration organisations are not sympathetic to the plight of such people.

A Catch-22 situation faces illegal immigrants who have applied under the three year programme and still have a long wait before their citizenship is approved. They will be forced to leave the country under the April 1 law. And if they leave they will not be able to come back for three years or ten years depending on the length of their illegal stay.

While Mexico is the number one country of origin for 2.7 million illegals and El Salvador ranks second with 335,000, Pakistanis and Indians make up a significant number totalling close to 75,000 and rank 16th and 17th

respectively.

"The lines at marriage bureaus are lengthening," said Ms. Margot Champagne, an immigrant lawyer of twenty years standing in Washington. "So what happens — everybody is going to stay here illegally for the rest of their lives — until another amnesty," she added.

But Jack Martin, of the conservative Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), said the three-year experiment "encourages" illegal aliens to pay the 1,000 dollars and become legal. FAIR was opposed to Section 245 (i), he said, when it was first adopted because it undermined laws adopted last year which were intended to deter illegal immigrants by setting the three-year and ten-year bans.

"There should be a zero-level or tolerance for illegal immigrants," said Martin who was once a consulate official abroad. "We are not concerned with the inconvenience caused," he emphasized. "We want the experiment to end." He noted that there had been concern in immigrant circles about those who are just about to get their citizenship. "They don't know

which way to jump right now."

Those whose citizenship is about to come through may decide to stay back in which case they would be illegal during their stay and if they left they would not be able to come back for three years or more. "I've seen some anecdotal evidence on the spur of marriages in the event the law ends," Martin said.

He indicated that it was too bad that the "good guys" got hurt with the "bad guys" but that the home country was the right place for clearing persons for U.S. citizenship. "I believe that the consular officers are the appropriate people to do the screening because often information not available here would be available in the home country that would disqualify someone from getting a visa," he said.

Bill Straussberger, a spokesperson for INS, told India Abroad News Service that the picture "is not looking too favourable" for an extension of the three-year programme. Since there was no provision under the law that allowed those who had applied for citizenship under Section 245 (i),

"they are in a quandary."

At the same time, he said, "INS is willing to give room to cases of spouses more than to cases of brother or sister." For instance, if a spouse has applied under the three year amnesty programme, INS may allow them to stay back in the U.S. to await citizenship and not have to go back. But if it is a sister or brother, INS would not be as considerate.

If 245 (i) is not extended, Straussberger conceded, many illegal immigrants will not be able to get legal status for the rest of their lives.

Eighty-three percent of illegal residents in this country have settled in seven states that traditionally have had the largest immigrant populations — California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey and Arizona. Indians have also largely settled in these states in significant numbers, except Arizona.

In a bid to counter Republican criticism that it was lax with immigrants, the Clinton administration beefed up the INS and border patrol. The estimate of five million illegals equals nearly two percent of the

country's population and has raised the ire of even the general population, particularly in California, resenting the public services that go to the children of illegal residents and the illegal residents themselves. It became a ballot issue in that state last year.

Indians and others who reside here illegally gain this status either by entering without inspection, or overstaying their visas by twelve months or more. As of October 1996, INS estimated that 41 percent of the total illegal resident population overstayed their visas and settled in the United States. The other 59 percent entered without inspection. Indians would largely become illegal through the first process. The INS claims that the number of people overstaying their visa privileges has been declining over time.

"The estimates of the illegal resident population settled in the United States highlight the challenges that face the nation in overcoming decades of underfunded efforts to control illegal immigration," the INS claims.

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