



Soldiers loyal to Afghan Commander Ahmed Shah Masood taking kebabs on a street some 50 kilometres from the Kabul frontline yesterday. Troops are constantly rotated between the frontline and the rear base positions of the army, allowing soldiers to enjoy a short break from the hardship of the front.

### Conservatives win spl parliamentary election

LONDON, Aug 1: The opposition Conservatives won a special parliamentary election and said early Friday it shows they're on the way back after their defeat by Labour in the May 1 national election, says AP.

"This is a great start. Trust is returning to the Conservatives. We are back in business," party leader William Hague said when the result was declared in the special election at Uxbridge, a prosperous town 15 miles (20 kilometers) west of central London.

Thursday's special election was the first test by voters for the parties since Labor took power under Prime Minister Tony Blair at the national election. The Conservatives have held the Uxbridge seat for 27 straight years.

Labour's national election win with a massive 178-seat majority over all other parties combined in the 659-seat House of Commons ended 18 years of Conservative government.

John Major, who had been Conservative party minister since 1990, quit as Conservative leader after his party's national election defeat and was replaced by Hague.

In Thursday's special election, Conservative candidate John Randall retained the seat for his party, securing 51 per cent of the votes against 39 per cent for Labour and 5 per cent for the centrist Liberal Democratic Party. Fringe groups shared the rest of the votes.

### Indian museum collecting arms used in freedom movement

CALCUTTA, Aug 1: The Indian Museum, which has planned major exhibitions in connection with the 50 years of independence, is in the process of collecting arms and weapons once used by the revolutionaries during the freedom movement, reports PTI.

The museum's director, Dr S Chakraborty, said yesterday that the efforts were on to procure arms and ammunition from the authorities concerned now in possession of such weapons. The exhibition on "arms and weapons as well as farewell to big games," will be held in September.

The museum's collection of items since 1947 in the fields of art, archaeology and anthropology, besides the objects brought from foreign countries during the last 50 years, would be opened to the visitors by August-end.

A rare painting of Gaganendra Nath Tagore on Rabindranath Tagore addressing the inauguration of Indian National Congress in 1917, would also form part of the exhibits, he said.

Meanwhile, the Victoria Memorial authorities have also organised exhibitions of photographs and paintings of both Indian and foreign artists to mark Golden Jubilee of Independence.

## Khemer Rouge rebels support Ranariddh ASEAN diplomats warned not to meddle in Cambodian affairs

PHNOM PENH, Aug 1: A day before a delegation of Southeast Asian diplomats was to arrive for a second try at solving Cambodia's political crisis, the country's foreign minister said Friday they should not interfere in Cambodia internal affairs, reports AP.

Speaking to reporters in front of the National Assembly Friday, Foreign Minister Ung Huot said Cambodia welcomed the foreign ministers from Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia.

"But no country in the world wants others to interfere in its domestic affairs. We are no different from them," said Foreign Minister Ung Huot, adding that the mission would meet with coup leader Hun Sen Saturday and leave the same afternoon.

Hun Sen has attempted to put up Ung Huot as a replacement for First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh, whom he ousted in a bloody takeover on July 5-6.

Several countries, including those of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, have said they still recognise Ranariddh as First Prime Minister. "What is not interfering in our internal affairs can be accepted by us," said Ung Huot.

ASEAN has indefinitely postponed Cambodia's entry into the regional economic bloc, originally scheduled for July 23, in objection to the violent change of government.

Several of Ranariddh's supporters — including senior government officials and at least 14 members of parliament — have fled the country fearing for their lives.

There have been at least 40 extra-judicial killings following the putsch, according to human rights officials who Thursday revealed evidence of ongoing killings.

Many of the victims were allied with Ranariddh's party or were part of military factions loyal to the ousted prime minister.

ASEAN has sought a role in mediating the conflict and sent the three foreign ministers to confer with Hun Sen shortly after the coup.

Hun Sen spurned the diplomats and said he would withdraw his country's application to join the group, but has since reiterated his desire that Cambodia become a full member of ASEAN and has shown a willingness to reopen dialogue.

One proposal put forth by ASEAN is that Ranariddh, who is out of the country and has been threatened with arrest should he seek to return, be allowed to come back to Cambodia and to participate in the 1998 national elections.

Hun Sen said in a radio broadcast with American Broadcasting Corporation the prince must face trial if he returns, but indicated that he was prepared to offer amnesty to the prince if found guilty.

Reuter adds: The Khemer Rouge guerrillas, who recently purged their notorious leader Pol Pot, said Thursday they supported Cambodia's ousted co-premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

The guerrilla group sealed an agreement with the prince's royalist party on July 4, the day before fighting erupted in Phnom Penh leading to Ranariddh's ouster by second Prime Minister Hun Sen, the Far Eastern Economic Review reported on Thursday.

A new generation of younger Khemer Rouge leaders wanted to join forces with the royalists and others and Pol Pot was purged for his violent opposition to the move, the magazine reported.

### Bandh begins in Bihar

PATNA, Aug 1: A down to dusk state-wide bandh called by the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in protest against alleged "false implication" of its national president Laoto Prasad Yadav in the fodder scam began in Bihar this morning amidst stringent security, reports PTI.

The bandh was reported to be in peaceful so far. Elaborate arrangements have been made to maintain law and order across the state with a red alert sounded.

Besides the existing police strength in Bihar 31 companies of central para military forces have been deployed in different areas of the state official sources said.

The RJD gave the call for the bandh soon after former Chief Minister, Yadav was remained to judicial custody by the special court rejecting his plea for regular bail when he surrendered in a conspiracy angle case of the fodder scam on Wednesday.

### Single 5-yr term for UN secy gen post okayed

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 1: A UN General Assembly reform group on Thursday recommended the institution of a single five-year term for the post of UN secretary-general, reports AFP.

The proposal was contained in a draft resolution transmitted on Thursday to the UN General Assembly for adoption at its next session opening in September.

The resolution summed up the main conclusions of the working group on strengthening the UN system, which was set up in September 1995 and was open to all 185 UN member states.

## BRIEFLY

**Blast claims 4 in India:** Four workers, including a teenager boy, were killed and two others injured in a blast in a quarrying unit Thursday in Kodangalpalayam about 30 km from Coimbatore police said, PTI reports from Coimbatore.

Two of them died on the spot and two on the way to the hospital, they said. The injured have been admitted to a city hospital in a serious condition, they said.

**Albright may visit ME:** US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is considering a trip to the Middle East in the wake of a suicide bombing that killed 15 people in Jerusalem, US officials said on Thursday, Reuter reports from Washington.

An Albright trip "is an option under consideration," said a senior State Department official who asked not to be identified.

**Hashimoto may visit Russia in Oct:** Japan's Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto is likely to visit Russia in October in the first step of a high-level dialogue he agreed with Russia President Boris Yeltsin, a report said yesterday, AFP says from Tokyo.

Discussions on Hashimoto's schedule have reached the final stages Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK) said without revealing sources. The summit is likely to take place outside Moscow as Hashimoto hopes to have a frank exchange of views in a relaxed atmosphere, NHK said.

**3 die as garage collapses in Poland:** Part of a parking garage under construction collapsed at Portland International Airport, killing three workers, AP says from Portland.

The accident occurred Thursday in a portion of the garage being expanded from three stories to seven stories. Several steel girders gave way, throwing workers who had been on top to the ground. "It looks like when the thing collapsed, it just dragged them right to the ground," said Portland Fire Bureau spokesman Neil Heesacker.

**Howard released from hospital:** Prime Minister John Howard returned home Friday after being released from a private hospital where he spent a week being treated for pneumonia, AP reports from Sydney.

Howard's spokesman said the prime minister was examined Friday morning by his doctors who declared the pneumonia had been beaten and allowed him to return home to his Sydney residence, Kirribilli House. Howard will now spend another week resting at home.

**Indonesia-Germany to sign MOU:** Indonesia will sign a Memorandum Of Understanding with Germany next month for the purchase of several U-206 submarines, the Indonesian Observer newspaper reported yesterday, Reuter reports from Jakarta.

### Kesri rules out indefinite support to UF govt

AMRITSAR, Aug 1: Congress president Sitaram Kesri yesterday ruled out an indefinite support to the United Front government and said the party would review its stand once "we feel we are capable of coming to power," reports PTI.

"Congress is not for support forever to the Front, but once the party is strengthened and is capable enough to come to power on its own, we will review our stand," Kesri told newsmen before emplaning for Delhi after a day's visit to the holy city.

Kesri and other senior leaders, who offered prayers at the Golden Temple and homage to Jallianwala Bagh martyrs on the occasion of "Shaheed Diwas" of Udham Singh, also addressed a party rally.

### Renewed fighting in Lanka 50 Tigers, 17 troops killed

COLOMBO, Aug 1: Heavy artillery exchanges left at least 50 Tamil Tiger guerrillas and 17 troops dead in renewed fighting in northern Sri Lanka, the Defence Ministry said today, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched a massive artillery and mortar bomb barrage near the army-held town of Nedukerni on Thursday night, a ministry spokesman said.

He said security forces brought in helicopter gun ships and fired artillery, inflicting heavy losses on rebels who are resisting the military's biggest ground offensive in the region.

Fourteen soldiers were also wounded in the long-range battle, the spokesman said adding that they believed at least 30 Tiger fighters were also wounded.

Replies to questions, Kesri said his party's support to the Gujrat government would continue but declined to divulge any time-frame.

His priority at the movement, the Congress president said, was to strengthen the organisation and the party would hold state-wide rallies after the Calcutta AICC session to counter casteist and communal forces in the country.

"I am not for power, but concentrating on strengthening the organisation," he said, adding he came here to get inspiration from martyrs to make extreme sacrifices to protect secularism, social unity and integrity of the country.

"Troops continue to dominate areas ahead of defences," the ministry said in a statement.

Government forces mounted their latest ground operation code named "Sure Victory" on May 13 in a bid to open a 75 kilometres (45 miles) highway through rebel-held territory in the north of the country.

However, the troops have managed to move only 16 kilometres (10 miles) so far because of intense rebel resistance and at least 392 soldiers have died since the operation was launched.

Tiger guerrillas are leading a drawn-out campaign for independence in the island's northern and eastern regions where the two million Tamil minority is concentrated.



Barbie the world's best selling toy is all set to pay homage to one of the world's timeless icons — Marilyn Monroe. In the latest addition to the Hollywood Legends series, the new Marilyn Barbie — in this undated handout picture — has been specially produced to commemorate the 35th anniversary, on 4th August 1997, of Marilyn Monroe's death, and is available from September retailing at £55 in United Kingdom. — AFP/UNB photo



House Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia laughs with his wife Marianne Gingrich, left, and Mary Ann Fish Thursday during a reception following the budget vote on Capitol Hill. — AP/UNB photo

### UNSC concerned at breakdown of Sierra Leone peace talks

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 1: The 15-member UN Security Council on Thursday expressed "deep concern" after the breakdown of talks aimed at restoring the legal government of Sierra Leone, reports AFP.

Sierra Leone coup leader Major Johnny Paul Koroma said late Wednesday his military junta would not hand over power to a civilian government before 2001, effectively torpedoing peace talks in Abidjan.

Regional foreign ministers grouped in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had been negotiating with Koroma's envoys in Abidjan for a return to civilian rule.

Security Council president Peter Oswald told reporters here that the Council during closed-door consultations expressed "Deep concern over the breakdown of talks in Abidjan yesterday between the ECOWAS Committee of Foreign Ministers and representatives of the illegal regime in Freetown."

Meanwhile, Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeke Anyaoku warned in London Thursday of "a major setback" for all of Africa if Sierra Leone

delays a return to civilian government.

"Any delay in the immediate transfer of power from the junta and back to civilian rule — let alone a postponement until 2001 — would represent a major setback not only for Sierra Leone and the West Africa region, but for the continent of Africa as a whole," he said.

"This is particularly so at this time when the whole of the international community has come to accept the illegitimacy of military takeovers of government," he said. "This move is totally unacceptable."

### Singapore tightens anti-smoking laws further

SINGAPORE, Aug 1: Singapore, which already has tough anti-smoking laws, tightened them further on Friday, reports AP.

From Aug. 15 lighting up will be banned in colleges, schools, private clubs and all air conditioned shops.

The Ministry of the Environment said the latest crackdown is designed to protect non-smokers from the harmful effects of second hand tobacco smoke.

Schools and junior colleges are to be totally smoke-free. At universities the ban applies only to covered structures, whether or not they are air conditioned.

An earlier ban applied to air conditioned offices and factories and air conditioned or enclosed common areas of private residential buildings.

These include stairways, enclosed elevator lobbies, toilets and pantries. Smokers can light up only outdoors or in special smoking rooms.

Managers of such places are responsible for enforcing the rules. Those who fail to do so face the same fines as smokers — up to 1,000 dollars (US 685 dollars) for the first offence and up to 2,000 dollars (1,370 dollars) for repeaters.

### Pan Am bombing US blasts Libya for sending letter to families of victims

WASHINGTON, Aug 1: US Attorney General Janet Reno blasted Libya on Thursday for sending the families of victims of the 1988 Pan Am 103 bombing a letter she called "a callous effort" to prey on emotions and undercut justice, reports AP.

At her weekly news conference, Reno said the unsigned letters were sent from the Libyan United Nations mission in June to victims' relatives who have sued Libya in New York for damages. The bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killed all 259 people on the plane and 11 people on the ground.

The letters claim Libya has made "substantial efforts" to bring to trial the two Libyan intelligence officers, Abdel Basset Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah, indicted in 1991 in the bombing. These have failed, the letter claims, because "the government of the United States is neither interested in the incident nor does it care about the victims."

Reno, who last met with the victims' families on June 3,

called that statement "not true" and "patently offensive." The families gave the government copies of the letter.

"The Libyan letter is a callous effort... to prey on the emotions of the families in an attempt to undercut our will to see that justice is served," she added.

She repeated the longstanding US demand that Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi turn over the two intelligence officers for trial in this country or Scotland. Libya has proposed they be tried at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, with Scottish judges or in some third, neutral country selected by the UN Security Council.

In addition, Reno said, "Libya must disclose all it knows of this crime, pay appropriate compensation" and cease "all forms of terrorist action and all assistance to terrorist groups."

Reno said some families wonder if the passage of time has lessened the US commitment to catching the bombers.

## Uncertainty grips unwanted Palestinian refugees for almost half a century

EIN EL-HILWEH, Lebanon. Aug 1: Abdullah Uthman remembers the night almost 49 years ago when he covered in bed with two brothers as Israeli soldiers dynamited houses to force the Palestinians out of the village of Sa'sa, reports AP.

As a refugee living in Lebanon, he used to go to the border to gaze into Israel at the village where his family had lived. He remembers the figs grown in the village.

Now that Israeli troops occupy south Lebanon, Uthman can't get even a glimpse of Sa'sa. While Uthman, who says he is "about 60," longs to return to his village, the only certainty in his life — though he does not recognise it — is that he will never again live among the fig trees of Sa'sa.

The future is uncertain for all Palestinian refugees, especially in Lebanon. Unlike in Jordan,

they have not been made citizens. Unlike in Syria, they cannot work freely in most jobs. The 55,000 residents of the Ein el-Hilweh refugee camp outside the port of Sidon feel forgotten. The 1993 Israel-Palestinian peace accord led the impression among many around the world that the Palestinian refugee problem was somehow being solved. But here they sit.

The Lebanese government doesn't want them to stay since the Palestinians, almost all Sunni Muslims, would upset the balance between Christians and Muslims in a country that is still recovering from a 15-year sectarian civil war.

Lebanon forbids them from all but the most menial jobs. Lately, it has restricted Palestinians who leave from returning, in an effort to hold down their numbers.

As refugees from the time of Israel's founding in 1948, their

future was to be decided in final-status peace talks that were supposed to start in May 1996. But wrangling and violence have put off the talks.

Every turn in the peace process is watched as a possible hint for what will happen to the Palestinians in the camp.

"What's our future? That's what we want to know," says Saleh Mustafa, a school principal. "Are we going to stay here? Are we going to go back?"

Mustafa says he was 4 when his family was driven out of Tarshih in Palestine.

As the refugees tell their stories, even those too young to have seen the old villages talk of the land as Palestine, not Israel.

West Bank or Gaza Strip, but many more cling to the unrealistic notion of returning to the places where they — or their parents or grandparents — were born.

Israel has steadfastly fought any such return for 50 years. But still the refugees talk of villages that no longer exist or are now populated by Israelis, some living in former Palestinian homes in Freetown.

Israeli historian Benny Morris described the fate of the villages in his book "The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-49." His account of Sa'sa — where Abdullah Uthman lived — is brief.

Jewish troops assaulted the village on Oct. 30, 1948, and expelled the Palestinians, as they did in other northern villages to try to make Jews a majority in the region and to secure the nearby border with Lebanon.

Uthman recalls how he and

his brothers clung to each other in bed as the soldiers dynamited the houses.

"I started feeling the rain," he says. "The Israelis were dismantling the town. They blew the roof off our house."

Still, Uthman wants to go back to Sa'sa. "My family had land and houses there," he says.

But the Sa'sa of Uthman's memory is gone. Two months after forcing out the Palestinians, Israel replaced the village with Kibbutz Sasa, a collective farm. More than 400 Israelis live there.

Uthman, 10 or 11 when he came to Lebanon, has been a labourer all his life, taking what jobs he could get. He and his wife had 15 children, nine of whom are still living in his two-room home among the camp's narrow alleys.

Ein el-Hilweh's tin-roofed, cement block houses have been rebuilt since the camp was al-

most wiped out in Israel's 1962 invasion. Its grayness is relieved by a few grapevines cascading from roofs.

Unemployment is estimated at 40 per cent or more. An influx of perhaps a million Syrian workers into Lebanon has taken away much of the labourers' work that once went to Palestinians.

Private charities that helped the camp now deal with more immediate crises in Rwanda and the Congo. Contributions are drying up from the Palestine Liberation Organisation, which used to pump millions of dollars into Lebanon. The UN Relief and Works Agency — which was created to help the Palestinians — is hard-pressed to meet their needs.

Fights between supporters and foes of PLO chief Yasser Arafat's peace plans have led to deaths. Arafat's popularity

grows or ebbs depending on the talks with Israel. It's on the wane these days.

Badih Karim and Munir Makdah were allies in battles against Israeli soldiers in Lebanon in the 1970s and '80s. But now Karim wants peace, while Makdah declares, "The solution is to cling to armed struggle."

A wiry man with a bushy, dark beard, Makdah takes up an AK-47 assault rifle to pose for a picture. He has formed what he calls the Black September 13 Battalions — named for the "black day" when Arafat and the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn.

But Makdah is said to have only a few dozen fighters. Arafat, by contrast, still pay hundreds or thousands of ex-guerrillas in the camp, albeit only about 52,000 Lebanese pounds (35 dollars) a month for most.

Amid disputes over whether Arafat is a traitor or hero, the people of Ein el-Hilweh ponder their fate. Some still dream of the promised return; others dare to admit they'll never see their old homes.

Mohammed Ahmed Said, 59, a math teacher in a UN school, declares that he will only return to Alma near the Lebanese border which, like Sa'sa was emptied of Palestinians in October 1949.

"If I cannot go back to my village, I prefer to stay in Lebanon," he says. "I grew up here. I was 11 when I came."

His wife, Fatma Saleh Aj-jami, 52, perhaps realises it will be impossible to remain in Lebanon. If peace comes, she says, she would accept going to the West Bank or Gaza.

"Anywhere in Palestine, I'd have no objections," she says. "The important thing is to return to your country."