

Cambodian exiled leader pleads to defend deposed PM Govt troops advancing on last resistance base of Ranariddh

CHONG CHOM PASS, Thailand, Aug 20: Fierce fighting moved within one kilometer (less than a mile) for the Thai border Wednesday as Cambodian government troops continued their assault on the last resistance forces of deposed First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh, reports AP.

The thud of mortars and the steady report of machine gun fire sheared the silence of the jungle as Ranariddh's troops clung to the last, thin slice of territory they hold inside Cambodia.

More than 7,000 soldiers loyal to coup leader Hun Sen have massed at the town of O'Puk about 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) inside Cambodia. From there they have been slowly encircling the village of O'Sinach, the largest remaining town controlled by somewhere between 2,000-5,000 of Ranariddh's troops. Thai army officers said.

The resistance forces are spread across a 25-kilometer (15.5-mile) line about five kilometers (3 miles) deep along the

border and with a headquarters at Rathchampey four kilometers (2.5 miles) from Thailand, said Boonthon Yen, an official from Ranariddh's party.

He said small contingents of Hun Sen's troops were attacking them from several directions at many points along the line, but resistance soldiers had expected the assault, were prepared and were retaliating with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, artillery and mortars.

"The fighting will get more serious later today," Boonthon Yen said.

In addition, he said Khmer Rouge guerrillas were laying land mines behind Hun Sen's troops to booby trap them if and when they retreat.

One Khmer Rouge guerrilla, wounded in the leg, was carried across the border to Thailand. Two of Hun Sen's soldiers had been killed this morning and one wounded, Thai army officials said.

Ranariddh's military commander, Gen. Nthek Bun Chhay, asked the Thai army to

open the border gateway twice Wednesday so about 150 more refugees could join the 35,000 who have already crossed to safety as fighting moved as close as one kilometer to Thailand.

Ranariddh was ousted as first prime minister by Hun Sen in bloody coup d'état on July 5 in Phnom Penh.

In the following weeks, Hun Sen's forces have pushed Ranariddh's men more than 100 kilometers (60 miles) to O'Sinach, where with their backs to the border, the overwhelmed resistance forces are making a desperate last-ditch defense.

Further south, another 1,000 refugees fled to the Thai town of Trat as fighting erupted between Khmer Rouge factions whose loyalties are split between Ranariddh and Hun Sen.

Meanwhile exiled dissident leader Sam Rainsy said Wednesday he's willing to return to Cambodia to defend co-premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh in a trial.

Arafat's call for stepping up contributions to UNRWA

ISLAMABAD, Aug 20: Despite legal challenges and angry protests by opposition parties, Pakistan's president has signed legislation to give the government sweeping power to combat ethnic and political violence wracking the country, reports AP.

In separate talks Tuesday with representatives of the four powers Arafat stressed the serious consequences for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip of any reduction in the services dispensed by the UN relief and works agency, officials here said.

He said UNRWA aid was even more essential now because of the repeated closures of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Israel.

The UNRWA General Commission Hansen said he has been obliged to slash his international staff by 15 per cent and to freeze recruitment of 249 teachers needed to cope with a big increase in the number of children enrolled at UNRWA schools.

Taliban ban use, trade of drugs

ISLAMABAD, Aug 20: The Taliban religious army has banned the use and trade of drugs in the regions of Afghanistan it controls, Taliban radio reported, reports AP.

Though vague, the statement could indicate that Taliban leaders had decided to respond to mounting international pressure to crack down on the country's drug trade.

The United Nations has said Afghanistan rivals Burma as the world's largest opium producer, and that the use of hashish is widespread.

The Taliban has said for months that it lacks the means to wipe out the drug trade. It has also said that despite Afghan farmers would have nothing to fall back on if cultivation was banned.

The statement Monday on Taliban's Radio Ghurjal said "narcotic materials should not be used, sold or bought," although it did not refer directly to cultivation. The statement was attributed to the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar.

The radio has broadcast conflicting statements in the past. While many foreign governments hoped the Taliban's strict version of Islamic life would lead to a ban on poppy production, the trade in opium has flourished in the years the Taliban has been gaining ground.

The Taliban's stronghold in southern Afghanistan produces much of the opium that makes its way to Europe and the United States.

France to buy uranium from Russia

PARIS, Aug 20: France's state-owned nuclear processing company said Tuesday it has reached an agreement in principle with Russia to buy uranium from the dismantling of that country's nuclear weapons, reports AP.

Under the accord, not yet finalised, the French company COGEMA says it will have two partners: Canueco of Canada and Nukem, the American subsidiary of a German company. The agreement would last a minimum of 10 years.

COGEMA is one of a number of firms around the world that have agreed to buy the Russian uranium as part of a global effort to limit the spread of weapons-grade nuclear materials.

The uranium would be processed, then used as fuel. The French would buy the uranium after it has been reprocessed and shipped to the United States under a US-Russia agreement.

In April, Russia's energy minister said the country had dismantled almost 50 per cent of its nuclear arsenal in compliance with international agreements.

Russia has an estimated 8,000 to 9,000 nuclear warheads, to be reduced to no more than 3,500 under the START II treaty with the United States.

The report did not provide

Pak president endorses Anti-terrorism Law

ISLAMABAD, Aug 20: Despite legal challenges and angry protests by opposition parties, Pakistan's president has signed legislation to give the government sweeping power to combat ethnic and political violence wracking the country, reports AP.

More than 400 people have died this year in fighting between religious sects in eastern Pakistan, and in political violence in Karachi, the country's largest city and economic centre. The government has deployed thousands of paramilitary troops in the two regions to quell the violence so far with limited success.

The violence has tarnished Pakistan's celebration this month of its 50th anniversary of independence from Britain.

The Anti-Terrorism Law, which was passed by the National Assembly last week and signed Monday by President Farooq Leghari, is the government's latest measure to end the fighting. Leghari's signature was the last step for the legislation to be implemented.

Under the law, police can search and arrest suspected militants without a warrant. Special courts will be set up to

Fresh advance on LTTE held territory Tigers claim heavy loss on troops

COLOMBO, Aug 20: Tamil Tiger guerrillas today said they had inflicted heavy losses on government forces and resisted a fresh advance on territory they hold, as the death toll climbed on both sides, reports AP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they recovered the bodies of eight Sri Lankan soldiers killed in fierce battles on Tuesday.

Government forces are engaged in a major drive to capture a key highway through rebel-held territory in the north of the country but intense rebel resistance has slowed the advance.

Since launching the offensive on May 13 to open the 75-kilometre (45-mile) road to the northern peninsula of Jaffna, more than 1,000 people have been killed.

The most ferocious battle was at the beginning of this month when army columns backed by tanks and air cover began moving towards the Tiger-held town of Pulyankulam.

Khatami urges hard-line MPs to accept his cabinet

Cabinet, saying his choices presented the values of the 1979 Islamic revolution, reports AP.

President Mohammad Khatami spoke to the Majlis, or parliament, at the start of a two-day nationally televised debate on his nominees to the Cabinet. A vote will be taken on each of his choices in the 270-member parliament on Wednesday.

Khatami, whose election was largely seen as a demand for an easing of strict Muslim laws, was expected to be challenged by the hard-line majority on two of his controversial choices — for culture and interior ministers.

"Our Cabinet is an educated one," he said. "There is a considerable number of post-graduate and Ph.D. holders and three ulema (clergy) in the Cabinet."

Typhoon Winnie kills 25 in eastern China

BEIJING, Aug 20: Typhoon Winnie whipped through eastern China, unleashing deadly winds and torrential rains that caused the deaths of at least 25 people, official reports said Wednesday.

The toll of casualties and damage was expected to rise as data was gathered from outlying areas, local officials indicated.

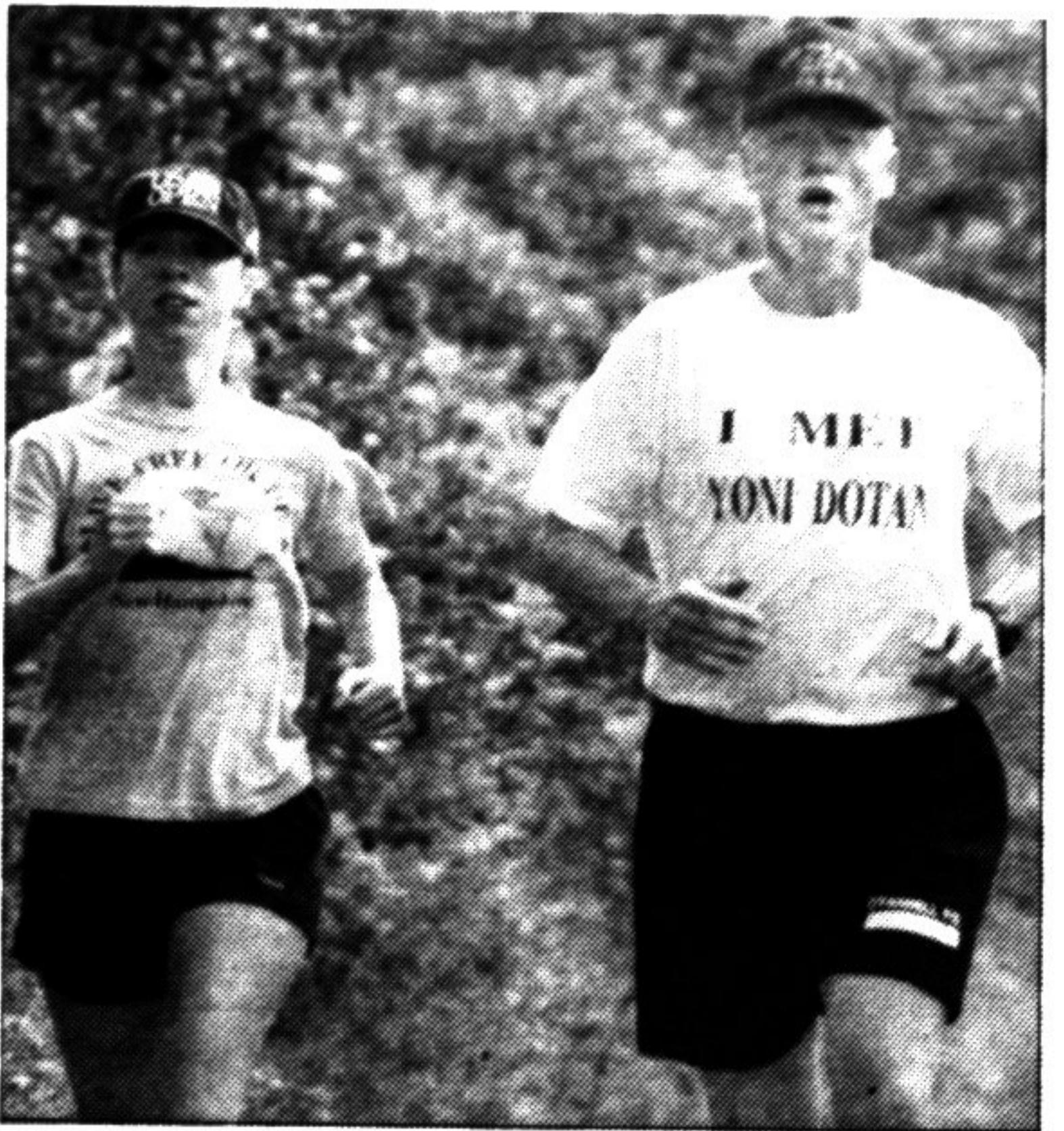
Winnie swept through eastern Zhejiang, killing 19, before moving on to neighboring Anhui province, where it dumped torrential rains before gradually dissipating, the newspaper China Daily said.

The report did not provide



Canadian and British Second World War veterans listen to a speech by Canadian War Veterans Minister, Fred J Mifflin (R), Tuesday in Dieppe to commemorate the bloody and abortive allied raid on the occupied town of Dieppe, western France, 55 years ago. Hundreds of British and Canadian war veterans gathered to commemorate the raid code-named "Operation Jubilee" designed in 1942 to test the fearsome German fortifications on the Normandy coast.

— AFP/UNB photo



US President Bill Clinton (R) along with daughter Chelsea Clinton (L) jog along West Tisbury Road in Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard Tuesday. President Clinton jogged for the first time in public since his knee operation, the Clintons jogged and walked almost three miles. — AFP/UNB photo

Crew of stricken Mir fix faulty computer

MOSCOW, Aug 20: Undeterred by the Mir's latest mishap, Russian space officials say they will press forward with a dangerous repair mission into a dark, damaged module of the troubled space station, reports AP.

By Tuesday, the main computer had been revived, and a critical but oft-delayed attempt to carry out more vital repairs was scheduled for Friday or Saturday. Essentially, those repairs would take place at the first possible moment after the current miss is fixed.

In the latest near-disaster aboard the Mir, the station's central computer failed on Monday and left the aging space outpost twisting in orbit for several hours. But Russian officials were not swayed from their goal of keeping the Mir flying into the next century.

If Russian space officials were dismayed by mounting concern over the trouble-prone

station, it was not evident Tuesday: Flight controllers at Mission Control cracked jokes, engineers chatted on phones and press officials urged droves of reporters to go home.

There's no news, "Mission Control spokesman Valery Lyndin insisted.

Russian officials have greeted most of the Mir's recent misfortunes — which began with a fire in February — with apparent placidity, insisting the station's two Russians and one American crew are not in danger.

That demeanor was unchanged Tuesday, with officials announcing that the computer had been brought back on line and an "internal" spacewalk — a dangerous rupture of the Mir's module — would proceed in short order.

The Mir is the jewel of Russia's once-mighty manned space program, which launched the first satellite into orbit.

Off the Record

Costly questions

DALLAS: Six Texas high-school teachers tried a different approach to get their students' attention by quizzing them on the mathematical problems inherent in a life of drugs, gangs violence and sex, reports Reuter.

Instead, the experiment in urban math sparked a storm of protest and all six teachers were suspended.

Dwain Dawson principal at the Elsie Roberts High School in the Dallas suburb of Lancaster, said on Tuesday that Math Department Head Scott Martin was suspended for 60 days and five other teachers were each suspended for 30 days, all without pay.

Last Thursday, when classes resumed following summer vacation, the teachers handed out a joke worksheet that included the following questions:

— Hector has knocked up six girls in his gang. There are 27 girls in the gang. What percentage of the girls in the gang has Hector knocked up?

— Johnnie has an ak-47 with an 80-round clip. If he misses six out of 10 shots and shoots 13 times at each drive-by shooting, how many drive-by shootings can he attempt before he has to reload?

— Jerome wants to cut his half-pound of heroin to make 20 per cent more profit. How many ounces of cut will be needed?

— Rufus is pimping for three girls. If the price is dollar 65 for each trick, how many tricks will each girl have to turn so Rufus can pay for his dollar 800 per day crack habit?

They should never have used the test," Dawson said. "It was a poor professional decision and it's unacceptable."

Titanic's youngest survivor finally finishes his journey

KANSAS CITY, Missouri: The youngest survivor of the Titanic has at last completed her journey — 85 years after setting out. And the long wait to see Kansas City was worth it, said Millvina Dean, who was 9 weeks old when the great ship went down, reports AP.

"Kansas City is so lovely I could stay here five years," Dean, a London resident, said Tuesday.

"If I win a prize in the lottery, which I hope to do because I play every week then I will be back," Dean said.

Dean arrived Sunday at the Kansas City house for which she and her family were ultimately bound when they boarded the Titanic at Southampton, England, in April 1912.

A battery of TV cameras awaited her in the living room of the house now owned by Mata and Katie Levi.

"It is all completely unreal to me," Dean said. "I never thought for a minute that I would be here."

Dean crossed the Atlantic this time aboard the Queen Elizabeth II and was met in New York last week by Kansas City businessman Michael Rudd, a member of the Titanic Historical Society, who had arranged her five-day visit.

The two arrived in Kansas City on Friday. Dean toured the nearby town of Kearney to see the home of Jesse James — "your famous highwayman" — on Saturday and reached Levi home on Sunday.

She has spent her time visiting relatives, students, members of the Titanic Historical Society and Kansas City Mayor Emanuel Cleaver, who gave her a book about the city.

"If things had worked out differently these are people she might have played with," said Rudd, who heads Travel Marketing Associates Inc. in Kansas City and has organised many Titanic-related tours.

A new reason of children's moodiness

CHICAGO: If your son or daughter has a moody personality, part of the reason may be testosterone, a study suggests, reports AP.

Researchers checked testosterone levels in 15 boys and 22 girls, ages 3 to 12, and had parents fill out a checklist about each child's behaviour.

Kids with higher testosterone levels tended to be more moody and less attached to others. Attachment was measured by how much they wanted to be close to Mom and liked to be cuddled or touched.

The parents rated moodiness by saying how typically the children showed behaviors like fussing, crying, waking up in a bad mood and being easily upset.

Rebecca Strong, a student at Georgia State University who did the work with psychology professor James M Dabbs Jr, said the effects of testosterone levels were slight. All the children were psychologically normal, she said.

She presented the work Sunday at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association.