

International

Savage battle for power between rival gangs

29 inmates hacked, stabbed to death in Venezuelan jail

EL DORADO, Venezuela, Aug. 29: Twenty-nine inmates were hacked and stabbed to death on Thursday at a remote Venezuelan maximum-security jail in a savage battle for power between rival gangs, authorities said, reports Reuters.

There are 29 dead and 13 injured, the scene inside is hellish, said Rodriguez, secretary general of Bolivar state, told Reuters outside the El Dorado Jail, 440 miles (700 km) southeast of Caracas.

Justice Ministry officials have earlier put the number of dead at 42, but local authorities explained that early reports were confused by scarce information from the rain forest region, in the heart of Venezuela's gold-rush territories.

The killers used machetes and primitive knives, decapitating several of the victims. Others were badly burned when the attackers set fire to their mattresses, officials said.

There are seven headless corpses and several with stab wounds and mutilated limbs, said Jose Alberto Zúñiga, a top official at the state governor's office.

At least two of the dead had their throats cut. Blood was splattered on the walls and heads and limbs lay scattered on the floor, prison officials said.

The carefully planned surprise attack started shortly after dawn when many of the prisoners were asleep and lasted for less than 20 minutes.

Seeking revenge for the recent murder of one of their gang leaders, a group of inmates broke the locks on their cell and launched the violent raid on a rival gang transferred from another jail.

As they approached, the attackers shouted a coded warning that guards were carrying out a weapons search, meaning that their victims were defenseless when they burst into the cell.

The savage raid was sparked by fierce rivalries between local inmates and a group of prisoners moved from La Sabaneta Jail in western Venezuela far from their families as a punishment, officials said. All of the dead were from La Sabaneta, they added.

"It was a lynching. The aim was to massacre them," Justice Minister Hilario Cardozo told a news conference.

Built in 1958, the El Dorado Jail lies across the river Cuyuni from the scruffy mining town named after the mythical south American city of gold.

Surrounded by water reputedly infested by piranhas and alligators, the jail once held famous French jail-breaker Henri Charrier, better known as Papillon who escaped.

"This place is the worst you could possibly imagine," a former El Dorado prisoner told Reuters. "They're the most dangerous criminals in the country, total animals, the scum of society."

Diet rich in soy reduces risk of uterine cancer

WASHINGTON, Aug. 29: A diet rich in soy and other legumes appears to reduce the risk of uterine cancer, says a new study published in the latest edition of the American Journal of Epidemiology, reports AFP.

The study, conducted by the Cancer Research Center of Hawaii, concluded that women who consume generous amounts of soybean products have a 54 per cent lower risk of getting cancer of the uterus than women who do not.

"Our data support the notion that diets low in calories and rich in legumes (especially soybeans), whole grain foods, vegetables and fruits reduce the risk of endometrial cancer," said professor Marc Goodman, one of the study's authors.

"This is the first study to show an inverse association of soy consumption with the risk of endometrial cancer," he added.

Lankan opposition for fresh peace efforts with Tigers

COLOMBO, Aug. 29: Sri Lanka's opposition, which holds the balance of power to make or break political reforms aimed at ending the country's drawn-out Tamil separatist war, is calling for a fresh peace bid with the rebels, reports AFP.

The opposition leader and former prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said peace talks between the government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could begin even while both sides were locked in combat.

Wickremesinghe told the Foreign Correspondents' Association of Sri Lanka late Thursday that his party was not against a dialogue between the government and the LTTE but talks and fighting should be considered separately.

"This way there can be unconditional talks and if they succeed then it could lead to

something," Wickremesinghe said, adding the Tigers were still a force to reckon with despite recent setbacks at the hands of the army.

The LTTE is leading a drawn-out campaign for a separate state called Eelam and more than 50,000 people have been killed in fighting since 1972. Wickremesinghe said the economy was unable to sustain the war for too long.

The government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga came to power offering a "hand of friendship" to the LTTE in 1994 but their honeymoon ended with the rebels pulling out of talks and resuming their drawn-out war in April 1995.

Just three months after the latest round of fighting broke out, Kumaratunga unveiled a radical power-sharing plan which seeks to turn the country into a federal state in all but name in exchange for ethnic

peace. The plan, in the form of a draft political package, is still before a parliamentary panel and requires the support of opposition leader Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) to be implemented.

President Kumaratunga announced Monday that she will hold a referendum on the reforms but under the constitution such vote is non-binding unless constitutional changes first receive a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Wickremesinghe rejected the government's plan and said holding a referendum before finalising the new constitution could shut the door to possible talks with the LTTE.

His UNP held talks with the LTTE in 1989 but the rebels pulled out in June 1990 to go back to fighting. In 1987 too the Tigers pulled out of an Indian-backed peace deal.



SFOR soldiers put up barbed wire around their position to protect themselves after clashes broke out with headline Bosnian Serbs on Thursday. The soldiers had been attacked after a message on Bosnian Serb radio calling on the Serbs to attack UN and NATO officials. The UN police office in Brcko was surrounded early in the morning by 400 Serb demonstrators, who hurled sticks and stones at the building. — AFP/UNB photo

Sharif turns to 'Mango diplomacy' with India

NEW DELHI, Aug. 29: Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif appears to have turned to 'Mango diplomacy' after several top Indian leaders confirmed here today they had received deliveries of the fruit from across the border, reports AFP.

Hindu nationalist and former Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee received a packet of mangoes from Sharif just before Indian celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence on August 15, an aide said today.

Communist leader Mumtaz Farooqi, meanwhile, who also received a delivery, told AFP the Pakistani leader probably wanted to develop a rapport with Indian politicians.

"I got the mangoes about 20 or 25 days back," said Farooqi, a member of the Communist Party of India (CPI), which forms part of the coalition government headed by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral.

"Yes, I was surprised. I don't know Nawaz Sharif personally. May be he wants to develop some kind of personal

relationship with political parties and their leaders here.

The Times of India newspaper said mangoes were also sent to President KR Narayanan, Vice-President Krishan Kant, Gujral and other 'top Indian politicians.'

Germany may slash aid to developing countries

BONN, Aug. 29: Germany is considering slashing aid to developing countries which refuse to take back their nationals expelled from Germany for violating immigration rules or breaking the law. Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said in an interview published today, reports AFP.

Kinkel told the Hamburg daily Abendblatt that the scale of the problem is such that it calls for a new method. Those who turn on the red light when they are asked to take back their own nationals who have been legally expelled, must not be surprised if we use the red pen to make savings on development aid."



A wounded Israeli soldier is evacuated from a helicopter near the Lebanese border by army medics Thursday as he was wounded after fighting two battles with the pro-Syrian Amal militia in south Lebanon. Four Israeli soldiers were killed and six others wounded in a huge fire started by Israeli artillery backing its ground troops on the border of the Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon, according to the Israeli military. Some of the Israeli soldiers were caught in the fire and burned to death. — AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

Albright to visit ME soon: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will travel to Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Israel on her maiden trip to the Middle East in some 10 days from now, sources said Thursday, AFP reports from Washington.

Albright will begin the visit on September 8 or 9, according to a diplomat. She is expected to spend five or six days in the region.

The choice of several destinations for the trip signalled that Albright does not intend to make vexing Israeli-Palestinian issues the sole focus of the visit.

Landslide kills 35 in Pakistan: At least 35 people were buried alive by a landslide in northern Pakistan's Shinkari Town, taking the toll from torrential rains across the country this week to 115, police and officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Islamabad.

Sources in the area told reporters the victims were members of five families and died during their sleep Thursday when a mudslide caused by heavy rains destroyed their homes.

Officials confirmed 80 other fatalities, 70 of them in the worst hit central Punjab province, since the monsoon conditions hit Tuesday.

Islamic scholar dies in India: Noted Islamic scholar and theologian, Maulana Gauri Siddiq Ahmad, died in Lucknow on Thursday following brain haemorrhage, PTI reports from New Delhi.

Siddiq Ahmad, 74, is survived by three sons.

He was admitted to a nursing home in Lucknow where he breathed his last, a Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind release said. Siddiq Ahmad was head of a well-known Islamic institution, Khamia Arabic, at Hathaura in Uttar Pradesh's Banda district.

NATO troops clash with Bosnian Serb crowds

BRCKO, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Aug. 29: NATO-led troops are becoming more deeply embroiled in the violent power struggle between the Bosnian Serb president and her predecessor, war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic, reports AP.

On Thursday, US soldiers that are part of the NATO force fired tear gas and warning shots to fend off rock-hurling Serb mobs. Two American soldiers were injured in the clash, one of the most serious involving NATO peacekeepers since the Bosnian war ended.

Several civilians also were wounded. Roving mobs smashed the cars of international officials and roughed up foreign reporters.

As NATO helicopters clattered overhead, US soldiers in full battle gear — the main component of NATO forces in the region — tried to maintain calm.

Thursday's violence stemmed from the feud pitting Serb President Biljana Plavsic against supporters of Karadzic, the Bosnian Serbs' wartime leader, and now the most wanted suspect sought by an international war crimes tribunal.

NATO said it moved into Brcko Bjeljina and Doboj to "defeat the outbreak of violence" after receiving indications that forces loyal to Plavsic would try to take control of police stations and media in Serb-held areas of northern Bosnia.

Its soldiers fired warning shots and tear gas to disperse crowds in Brcko (pronounced BIRCH-koh) after local police failed to do so. NATO officials said they knew of no injuries caused by their forces.

In addition to US troops, lesser numbers of Russian, Nordic and Polish peacekeepers patrol the region.

NATO has sided increasingly with Plavsic, the Bosnian Serb republic's elected leader — and the only senior Bosnian Serb official who will honor the 1995 Dayton peace accords — but said it also aims to prevent violence between the two factions.

The pro-Karadzic premier, Gojko Klekovic, told a rally of 3,000 in Brcko that Serbs had accepted the force "as people and as democrats... but what they are doing is not within their mandate."

"We won't give them Karadzic," he proclaimed.

Diana again adorns front pages of British tabloids

LONDON, Aug. 29: Princess Diana again adorned the front pages of the British tabloids today, this time as she raised her leg over Egyptian millionaire Dodi Al-Fayed's shoulders to clamber aboard his jet-ski, reports AFP.

The princess swung a leg over Dodi's shoulder as they larked around on a jet-ski trip in the med, said The Sun, which carried a series of photos showing how Diana, wearing a set of enormous flippers, got herself into the perilous position.

The pictures came just a day after the anniversary of Diana's divorce from Prince Charles.

The princess, currently in the south of France with Al-Fayed on her fourth holiday this summer, sparked outrage among Britain's opposition Tories this week when she reportedly used the word "hopeless" to describe their attitude towards her campaign for an international ban on land mining.

"We won't give them Karadzic," he proclaimed.

Sihanouk calls for peace before returning to Cambodia

SIEM REAP, Cambodia, Aug. 29: Leaving China after six months of medical treatment, Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk said Friday he hopes to restore peace to his homeland following a bloody coup that has ignited factional warfare, reports AP.

Top officials of the new regime installed by Second Premier Hun Sen in the wake of his takeover July 5-6 gathered at this northern city to await Sihanouk's arrival from Beijing later in the day.

The welcoming party included Ung Huot, installed by Hun Sen to replace his co-premier, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, Sihanouk's son, who was deposed in the putsch that shattered a tense coalition which emerged from UN-sponsored elections in 1993.

Sihanouk, 72, had been in Beijing since February, receiving medical treatment. In recent years he has suffered cancer, a stroke, cataracts and arteriosclerosis, an abnormal thickening of the arteries' walls.

He has said deteriorating health will force him to return to China in three months.

"We are very happy to receive our father who is coming back to Cambodia," Ung Huot said. "He is coming back to pray for peace and national reconciliation."

Hun Sen, co-defense ministers Tea Banh and Tea Chamrath, Interior Minister You Hockry and army chief of staff

Australia reports 135 illegal Chinese immigrants

CANBERRA, Aug. 29: Australia has flown 135 illegal Chinese immigrants back to China, a spokesman for Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said Friday, reports AP.

The two women, five boys and 128 men were deported Thursday on a chartered Boeing 767 from the Port Hedland detention center in Western Australia to the city of Xia Men.

The group were intercepted June 13 in the Torres Strait north of Australia aboard a steel-hulled boat with modern navigational equipment, unlike the usual wooden, often unseaworthy boats.

Gato Kr Kim Yan were also on hand.

Portraits of Sihanouk and Queen Monineath and Cambodian flags were set up at the airport and the streets of the small provincial capital, 225 kilometers (140 miles) were cleared of garbage.

Sihanouk plans to pray for peace over the next several weeks in accordance with Buddhist holidays at the nearby Angkor temples that were the seat of power of ancient Khmer god-kings.

Though his powers are limited by Cambodia's constitutions, the ailing king remains popular with his countrymen and is probably the only Cambodian leader who can temper Hun Sen's rapid consolidation of power.

In a statement released before the left Beijing, Sihanouk said that he would not actively condemn Hun Sen or show his displeasure regarding recent political upheavals by abdicating.

"All I can and must do is to call on Hun Sen and all parties concerned to realize a general cease-fire at the earliest possible date," said the king in the statement.

Deaths in HK hospitals shake Asian health systems

HONG KONG, Aug. 29: One patient dies after getting the wrong blood type in a transfusion; another succumbs after having oxygen pumped into her veins. A third is recovering from an intravenous injection of milk, reports AP.

A spate of hospital bungles — many injurious, some deadly — is shaking public confidence in one of Asia's most advanced health systems. While at least one health official insists there are no more problems than usual — just more coverage of them — the outcry has been strong enough to prompt apologies and promises of sweeping changes.

The litany of errors started making headlines in mid-August, when a 20-year-old car accident victim received a massive dose of the wrong blood in an emergency room and died hours later.

The death triggered a media hunt for more of the same.

An 84-year-old woman was reported to have died in April after staff mixed up tubes and pumped oxygen into her blood instead of into the air cushion under her neck.

A 25-year-old pregnant woman gave birth on a bus after the hospital sent her home, saying she had a stomach ache, and two cases emerged of surgeons severing a fallopian tube during an appendectomy, impairing the patients' chances of giving birth.

A student nurse at an intensive care unit mistakenly connected a nutrition pack to an intravenous line rather than a feeding tube, sending milk

streaming into a patient's bloodstream.

The mistakes provoked a small, banner-waving protest Sunday outside Queen Mary Hospital, one of Hong Kong's premier teaching institutions, where several of the blunders happened.

It is very unfortunate that these incidents have occurred and we are very sorry," Health Secretary Katherine Fok told lawmakers.

She said the Hospital Authority, which oversees Hong Kong's hospitals, was "taking

UNSC imposes sanctions on UNITA

UNITED NATIONS, Aug. 29: The UN Security Council imposed sanctions Thursday on Angola's former rebel movement UNITA for failing to comply with peace accords, officials said, reports AFP.

The measures restrict travel by members of the right-wing National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and an international embargo on flights to or from UNITA-controlled territories.

The 15-member Council's resolution also bans the provision of a wide range of aviation services to UNITA including aircraft engineering and maintenance and certifications of airworthiness.

The sanctions are scheduled to go into effect September 30.

very urgent steps" to remedy the crisis, and that foreign experts would be brought in to help.

Despite being a capitalist citadel with no universal welfare system, Hong Kong takes pride in its health system, which provides comprehensive care for its 6.3 million people. At government centres, care comes at just \$8.70 a day for each hospitalized patient.

But surgeon and legislator Leong Che-hung says the government must move fast to restore confidence, while Dr. Lee Kin-hung, president of the Hong Kong Medical Association, faults the Hospital Authority's management culture.

Some senior staff may be too preoccupied with administration, and "clinical monitoring may have slackened a bit," he said.

The Hospital Authority itself has refused to comment. But Lee also defended the hospitals, saying, "Medical mishaps occur everywhere, not only in Hong Kong... No one can ensure 100 per cent good results."

It's not that bungling has increased, but that the news media are more alert to it, he said. "Attention is brought because of the headlines in the newspapers."

Physician and former legislator Huang Chen-ya says hospitals try to get by with too few staffers and inadequate cross-checking.

Very junior doctors and nurses are left unsupervised," he acknowledged. But, he added,

US army drill instructor convicted of sexual misconduct

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Missouri, Aug. 29: A US Army drill instructor was convicted of charges related to sexual misconduct with a trainee and sentenced to two years in prison, reports AP.

Elsewhere Thursday, a military jury in Columbia, South Carolina convicted a former Fort Jackson drill sergeant of 15 counts of sexual misconduct and acquitted him of two rape counts. Sgt. 1st Class Stanley Barner, 36, of Cordele, Ga. could receive 40 1/2 years in prison.

At Fort Leonard Wood, Sgt. 1st Class Gary F. Alford was found guilty of sodomy, adultery, conspiring to violate a military regulation and three counts of violating a military regulation.

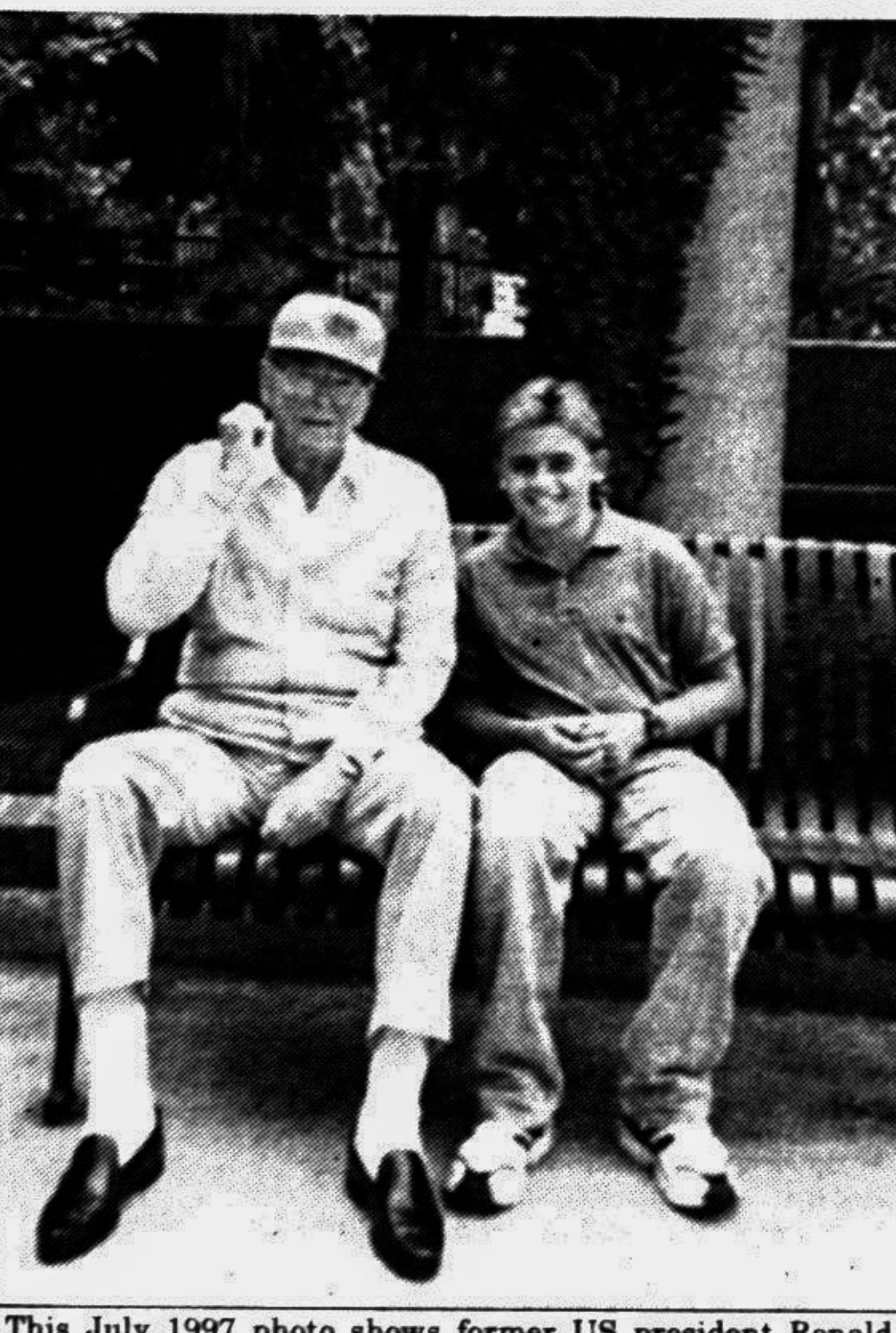
Alford, 32, of Meridian, Mississippi, was found innocent of other charges including four counts of violating a military regulation and one count each of committing an indecent act with a trainee, perjury and sodomy.

Alford was accused of being part of an organized plot with other drill instructors to have secret sexual liaisons with trainees. Fort Leonard Wood is the home to basic training units and is expected to handle some 21,000 trainees during the current fiscal year. Alford approached at least seven trainees and had consensual sex with at least three of them, prosecutors said.

Seven other noncommissioned officers at Fort Leonard Wood have been convicted



Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk hands over flowers offered to him as a farewell token at Beijing's Capital Airport Thursday. The 74-year-old monarch set himself in the role of peacemaker as he left Beijing to return to Cambodia and Hun Sen's new-look regime, following the ouster last month of his son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, as co-premier. — AFP/UNB photo



This July 1997 photo shows former US president Ronald Reagan (L) posing in Armand Hammer Park in Los Angeles, CA with Sylvia, OH, resident Rostik Denenburg, 12, in a photo taken by Denenburg's grandfather, Yakov Ravin. Ravin, a Ukrainian immigrant, recognised the former president while he and his grandson were visiting the Los Angeles park, which is not far from Reagan's Bel-Air home. — AFP/UNB photo