

Cambodian opposition to boycott polls

PHNOM PENH, Jan 7: Cambodian leader Hun Sen said Wednesday that elections scheduled for July would go ahead as planned whether or not his political opponents decide to participate, reports AP.

Leaders of the Union of Cambodian Democrats — an alliance of opposition parties created after Hun Sen seized power in a coup d'état last July — have threatened to boycott the poll.

"To boycott is their problem, the election cannot wait," said Hun Sen who holds the title of second prime minister.

The election will still be held even if there is or there is not participation of those people, Hun Sen told reporters at a ceremony marking the 19th anniversary of the overthrow of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime.

The Union of Cambodian Democrats is made up of Norodom Ranariddh's royalist Funcinpec party, dissident

leader Sam Rainsy's Khmer National Party, a wing of the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party and the Khmer Neutral Party.

The UCD leaders said they would consider withdrawing from the elections if it appeared they were "designed only to legitimise the illegal and unpopular regime now in place in Phnom Penh."

Hun Sen ousted Ranariddh — who won the UN — sponsored 1993 elections — as first prime minister following two days of fierce fighting in Phnom Penh on July 5-6 last year.

Executions by Hun Sen's forces of at least 43 of Ranariddh's supporters in the weeks that followed sent scores of his loyalists into hiding.

Others, including Ranariddh, fled the country and are seeking a safe return to participate in next year's polls.

Hun Sen has threatened to arrest Ranariddh if he returns and to try him on charges of weapons smuggling.

Lunar Prospector launched to look for water in moon

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, Jan 7: NASA headed back to the moon for the first time in 25 years, launching an orbiting spacecraft to look for water that could one day be used by human settlers, reports AP.

With a half moon gleaming in the sky, the unmanned Athena rocket blasted off at 9:28 pm Tuesday (0228 GMT Wednesday) with the Lunar Prospector. Launch controllers cheered and applauded loudly.

"We're on our way," gushed mission manager Scott Hubbard.

Programme scientist Joseph Boyce, who worked on NASA's Apollo moon missions, including the last one in December 1972, was ecstatic.

"After 25 years of having not been to the moon by NASA, it certainly feels good to be going back," Boyce said. "I couldn't be more excited, more happy, more

pleased."

It was the second launch attempt.

Monday's try was foiled by the failure of Air Force radar needed to track the rocket for safety reasons. The system was fixed Tuesday and, to NASA's relief, everything went well the second time around.

An attached motor promptly fired an hour after liftoff, propelling Prospector out of low-Earth orbit and toward the moon.

"We're not there yet," Boyce noted, "but right now things look great."

Prospector is due to arrive at the moon Sunday following a 4 and half-day trip spanning 240,000 miles (384,000 kilometres). Two days later, the probe will slip into a 6-mile-high (96-kilometre-high) orbit and begin searching for evidence of frozen water as well as minerals and

gases.

The spacecraft has five science instruments, including a neutron spectrometer that will look for excess hydrogen, an indication of water.

Some scientists believe the moon's shadowy poles hold as much as 1 billion tons of water ice, a theory bolstered by the military's Clementine spacecraft, launched to the moon in 1994.

If that's so, astronauts living on lunar bases could mine the water and separate it into hydrogen and oxygen for rocket fuel.

The 4-foot (1.2-metre), 650-pound (295-kilogram) Prospector will survey the entire moon, orbiting from pole to pole. The 63 million mission, part of NASA's low-cost, fast-paced Discovery programme to explore the solar system, is expected to last at least a year.

Di's burial place will be open for viewers from next summer

LONDON, Jan 7: More than a quarter of the tickets which will allow admirers of the late Diana Princess of Wales to view her burial place next summer, were sold in the first 48 hours after telephone lines were opened for reservations, reports AFP.

About 40,000 of the 150,000 tickets were snapped up by amateurs despite their having to wait for several hours to get through because of the rush or the 220 special lines after they were opened on Monday.

About 2,500 people a day will be able to see the grave at the Spencer family seat at Althorp north of London during the operation from which profits will go to the Diana Memorial Fund.

Visitors will be able to view from a distance the princess's grave on an island in the middle of a lake, but will not be allowed to set foot on the island.

Althorp will be open from July 1, which was Diana's birthday, until August 30. The Spencer family wanted the estate to be closed on August 31, the first anniversary of the princess's death.

Men who eat fish weekly less likely to die suddenly

CHICAGO, Jan 7: Eating fish just once a week cuts in half men's chances of suddenly dying from heart attack, according to a new study appearing in the latest journal of the American Medical Association, reports AFP.

A study of nearly 21,000 male doctors aged 40 to 84 years found men who eat fish weekly are 52 per cent less likely to die in the hour following a heart attack than those eating fish less than once a month.

The study will appear in the publication's January 7 issue.

Researchers at Brigham and women's hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, also found chances of dying from heart attack were reduced to smaller degree by a special type of fat found in seafood.

"All levels of fish consumption were associated with a decreased risk of sudden death," said the study's principle author Christine Albert, "but the size of the reduction did not appear to differ substantially at levels of consumption greater than on fish serving per week."

The study's dramatic results could also be due to fish eaters' unusually healthier lifestyles, which include frequent exercise and taking vitamins against cardiovascular problems, the scientists report.

Some 250,000 Americans die from sudden heart attacks each year. Most die before reaching a hospital, and 55 per cent of them have no previous history of heart problems.

ROK diplomat's wife, daughter kidnapped in Yemen

SANAA, Jan 7: Armed Yemeni tribesmen kidnapped the wife of a South Korean diplomat, her three-year-old daughter and a South Korean businessman in the Yemeni capital Sanaa on Monday, a security official said here Tuesday, reports AFP.

The official said the kidnappers took the three to the Ahams region, 160 kilometres (99 miles) southeast of Sanaa, where 120 soldiers have "surrounded the kidnappers to try to free the hostages."

The official who asked not to be named said the kidnapped woman was the wife of the First Secretary at the South Korean embassy in this country in the southwestern Saudi peninsula.

The Security forces will not spare any effort in trying to win the hostages' freedom from the members of the Al-Hadadi tribe who kidnapped them, he added.

The kidnapping occurred on a main road in Sanaa where the three armed men took advantage of the Yemeni chauffeur's temporary absence to hijack the three Koreans' car," he said.

Bid to create security interest Cohen begins Far-East tour

WASHINGTON, Jan 7: Defence Secretary William Cohen departs Saturday on an 11-day tour of the Far East that will include visits to Southeast Asia, China, Japan and South Korea, the Pentagon announced Tuesday, reports AFP.

Originally scheduled for November but postponed because of troubles with Iraq, the trip comes amid economic crises in East Asia that have abruptly changed the outlook for the region.

"The message of this visit is that the United States has a strong interest in security in Asia," said Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon, noting the presence of 100,000 US troops in the region.

"We want to work with countries throughout Asia to maintain peace and stability in the region. Economic stability is a very important part of general stability in the region," he said.

The impact of the crisis on arms purchases and military

modernisation were among the issues expected to come up, he said.

Cohen is able to make the Asia trip now because the situation in Iraq "has changed dramatically" with the return of UN arms inspectors to Baghdad, Bacon said.

The Defence Secretary will travel first to Southeast Asia, visiting Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand before traveling north to Beijing.

Cohen's trip to China will be the first by a US defence secretary since 1994 and marks the latest step in US rapprochement with Beijing.

While there, Cohen will sign an agreement setting out maritime "rules of the road" to prevent incidents at sea between their two navies.

The two countries squared off in early 1996 when Washington sent two aircraft carriers to the western Pacific to counter Chinese missile tests.

Off the Record

Beware of dogs in US

CHICAGO: Dog bites man. Often. Nearly 4.5 million dog bites occur annually in the United States, sending 334,000 victims to hospital emergency rooms. That's more ER visits than injuries from skateboards, baby walkers and in-line skates combined, reports AP.

Dog bites kill about 20 people a year in the United States. And US dogs really do seem to prefer biting boys.

These are the findings of researchers at the Centre for Injury Research and Control at the University of Pittsburgh. The researchers analysed data from emergency rooms nationwide.

The results, culled from data for 1992-94, are published in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association.

Among the highlights: Children were the most frequent targets. Victims ranged in age from infants to 91; the average age was 15.

The highest incidence was among boys ages 5 to 9, with 57,580 emergency room visits during the three-year period, for a rate of 60.7 dog bite cases per 10,000 people.

Of nine activities examined, only baseball and softball injuries accounted for more emergency room visits than dog bites: 404,364 a year. In-line skating accounted for 75,994 ER visits, baby walkers 28,000 and skateboards 25,486.

The total annual payment for emergency room treatment for dog bites was estimated at dollars 102.4 million.

A wake-up call for parents

LUSAKA: A total of 1.8 million teenage girls fell pregnant and aborted in Lusaka alone in the past three years, the Zambia Association on teenage pregnancies and a awareness has said, reports Xinhua.

The Zambia news agency Monday quoted chairperson of the association Tamba Chinyemba as saying at the weekend that the girls are mostly in the age group of between 12 and 21 years and most of them live in high density townships of the capital city with a population of about 250,000.

Nearly all the girls have a poverty background which forces their parents to marry off their daughters soon after puberty, she said.

She said a survey by the association shows that most of the girls are now aborting or having plenty of children they are unable to look after.

Most of the girls have been going to the maternal referral clinic for specialist treatment especially when they attempt abortions, she said.

The association plans to start an education campaign in these townships to teach teenagers on the dangers of unplanned pregnancies and abortions.

Chinyemba said the organisation will call for in its campaign reproductive health method such as contraceptives to protect health of the girls.

Cupids of Cuba

HAVANA: Cubans are the most passionate and gifted lovers in the world, if they do say so themselves, reports AFP.

Several studies released Sunday in the official weekly Juventud Rebelde highlighted Cubans' stratospheric sense of sexual self-worth, but others showed that only half of non-Cubans share this view.

In a poll of 300 people by the psychology department of the University of Havana, most said Cubans were more passionate than inhabitants of other countries.

Only 37.8 per cent said the island nation's population was average and just a few said Cubans lacked the passion of non-Cubans, according to Juventud Rebelde.

Not everyone on the planet shares Cubans' view of themselves: a study of 300 non-Cubans showed that most think people here are "nice, but let's not exaggerate."

Good news for women

LONDON: US scientists have developed a new technique for rebuilding breast tissue using other cells from the woman body the Sunday Times reported, says AFP.

The method could enable women who have had a mastectomy to avoid artificial breast implants and regrow new breasts naturally.

The project was launched by Reprogenesis. A firm based in Boston which works with university research teams in Anna Arbor in Michigan and in Charlotte in North Carolina.

Nipple have already been reconstituted using the new technique and the first experimental grafts will start in a few months, the paper said over the following 12 months experiments to implant bigger samples of breast tissue would be carried out, the report said.

"Our initial intention is to provide an option for breast cancer patients, but the method could be used for cosmetic reconstruction and it has generated a lot of interest," said Shawn Stovall, a spokesman for Reprogenesis.

Scientists said it should be possible in five years time to implant a whole breast and hopefully reproduce lactation so recipients could breast feed their babies.

US to examine massive UN appeal for food to DPRK

WASHINGTON, Jan 7: The United States will examine a massive UN appeal for food aid to North Korea, a State Department spokesman said on Tuesday, noting America "responded promptly and generously to previous appeals," reports Reuters.

Earlier in the day, the UN World Food Programme asked for dollars 378 million in food aid to avert famine in communist North Korea, hit by a three-year series of crop disasters. It was the largest appeal ever by the WFP.

"We will carefully examine this appeal and the United States intends to consult with other countries and we have always responded positively to previous appeals for the needy children of North Korea," Rubin said at a news briefing.

"And, this is a humanitarian policy we've had in the past."

We have an excellent record in this regard. We responded promptly and generously to such appeals in the past."

Rubin said the United States led other nations with donations through WFP of 170,000

metric tons of food, worth dollars 50 million, for North Korea in 1997.

Other officials indicated it might be a couple of weeks before the United States responded to the UN request for 657,972 metric tons of food-corn-soya blend, sugar, cereals, oils, pulses such as dry beans, and high-energy fortified biscuits, another 360,000 tons of food aid was expected from bilateral donors.

WFP said it would distribute food to 7.5 million people, roughly one-third of North Korea's 23.2 million people, aid was provided to 4.7 million people last year.

Hunger and malnutrition became widespread in North Korea after devastating floods in 1995 and 1996 and a drought in 1997.

UN agricultural experts estimated last November that more than one million tons of food aid would be needed this year because of the small harvest and North Korea's limited ability to buy food, due to loss of favourable trade terms and declines in its industrial base.

BRIEFLY

Ross meets Arafat: US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross met Tuesday with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who insisted Israel's coalition troubles must not stop movement in the peace process, officials said, AFP reports from Bethlehem.

Ross met Arafat in the West Bank town of Bethlehem after holding talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem to push a US package deal which aims to bring the two sides into negotiations for a final peace accord.

10 more escape from SA jail: Another 10 inmates escaped from South African jails on Tuesday, police said, taking the number of escapees in the country to around 700 in the past two months, reports Johannesburg.

Police spokesman superintendent Doep Du Poooy said the group forced open a door as police were unlocking cells to feed them at the Dirkiesdorp police station, in eastern Mpumalanga province near the farming town of Piet Retief. "They forced open the door and started running away at great speed," Du Poooy told the SAPA news agency.

4 more die in Tajik train crash: Four more people died of injuries sustained in a train crash in northern Tajikistan, raising the final death toll to 17, a senior official said Tuesday, AFP reports from Dushanbe.

General Mumin Mamajonov, emergencies ministry chief in the Leninabad region, said the collision Monday between two trains killed 17 people and injured 26, of whom eight remained in a serious condition although their lives were not in danger. A passenger train from Uzbekistan crashed into a goods train being shunted at Karachukm station, four carriages were gutted by a fire and derailed in thick fog. The casualty toll stood at 13 killed and 20 injured Monday.

Cyclone Susan heading towards Fiji: After killing a woman in Vanuatu, Cyclone Susan veered toward Fiji on Wednesday, prompting Fiji's weather service to issue an alert to the southern and western islands, AP reports from Sydney.

Hurricane force winds of up to 125 mph (200 kph) are swirling about the cyclone, which is expected to pass 185 miles (300 km) southwest of the main island of Viti Levu on Thursday morning. But Fiji's weather bureau in Nadi said the cyclone could change course, Australian Broadcasting Corp, radio said.

2 die as bldg collapses in Mexico: A fish cannery under construction in the Pacific coast port of Mazatlan collapsed Tuesday, killing two workers and injuring 23, police said. Another 17 were reported missing, AP says from Mexico City.

Mazatlan police chief Hector Perez Lopez told reporters that the 33-foot (10-metre) tall wooden scaffolding collapsed under the weight of concrete as it was poured to form a 1,440-square-foot (400-square-metre) floor. The government news agency Notimex quoted Perez Lopez as saying the collapse was apparently caused by an error in calculating the weight of the floor being built.

Blast kills 4 cops in Taiwan: Four policemen died in an explosion and fire at an armaments repair facility in suburban Taipei on Wednesday, AP reports from Taipei.

The four officers suffered third degree burns over up to 95 per cent of their bodies and showed no vital signs on arrival at hospital, doctors and MacKay Memorial Hospital said. Another officer was being treated in intensive care. The cause of the fire in a room was still under investigation, but initial media reports said it may have been started by a short circuit.

Rabbani to meet Tajik president: Burhanuddin Rabbani, the ousted president of Afghanistan, met Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov on Tuesday to discuss ways of resolving the violent political conflict in Afghanistan, an Afghan embassy official said, reports Reuters.

The embassy remains loyal to Rabbani, forced out when the Islamic Taliban militia seized Kabul in a military advance in September 1996. Rabbani, who arrived in the Tajik capital after visiting Iran and Pakistan, repeated his earlier appeal for an international conference on Afghanistan to be convened under the auspices of the United Nations.

Fire at bldg kills 1 in HK: One man died and 50 people including two firemen were injured in a fire at a high-rise residential building in Hong Kong, a government spokesman said early Tuesday, AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The 52-year-old man died in hospital after being rescued from the 20-storey shopping and residential building in a crowded street in north point on the east of Hong Kong Island. Of 90 people rescued from the building, 50 were rushed to hospital, mainly suffering from smoke inhalation, and 47 were admitted for treatment, the spokesman said.

Libya reacts sharply to US allegation of terrorism

TRIPOLI, Jan 7: Libya reacted bitterly Tuesday denying it provided any support for terrorism, after the United States renewed economic sanctions against it for the 13th year, reports AFP.

On Monday, President Bill Clinton extended for 12 months the sanctions imposed in January 1986 and which consist of an economic embargo and a freeze on Libyan assets in the United States.

"The government of Libya has continued its actions and policies in support of terrorism, despite the calls by the United Nations Security Council," Clinton wrote in a January 2 letter to Congress made public Monday.

Describing Libyan actions and policies as a continuing threat to the United States, he added, "For these reasons, I have determined that it is necessary to maintain in force the broad authorities necessary to apply economic pressure to the government of Libya to reduce its ability to support international terrorism."

The Libyan Foreign Ministry said Tuesday that the "allegations are false."

A Foreign Ministry

spokesman quoted by JANA news agency, said: "The American accusations of support for terrorism are meant to discredit Libya's appeals on behalf of nations whose ambition is to live in freedom and with dignity."

Libya is "a small peaceful country thousands of kilometres (miles) from the United States and cannot threaten the security of a large country with a huge military arsenal," the spokesman said.

Algerian Foreign Ministry summons US envoy

ALGIERS, Jan 7: The US ambassador to Algeria, Cameron Hume, was summoned to the Algerian Foreign Ministry Tuesday and told flatly that no international enquiry into Algerian massacres would be welcome. The official APS news agency reported, reports AFP.

The US State Department called Monday for an enquiry into the human rights situation in Algeria after the latest massacre reportedly claimed the lives of more than 400 villagers.

Opposition accuses Taliban of slaughtering 600 civilians

ISLAMABAD, Jan 7: The opponents of Afghanistan's hard-line Taliban army say Taliban troops massacred at least 600 civilians in northwestern Faryab province, reports AP.

In a letter released Wednesday, a Taliban opposition spokesman, identified only as Abdullah, complained to the United Nations that the killings occurred January 1 and 2 in Afghanistan's northwestern Qaisar district of Faryab province.

Another 20,000 civilians

fled the area.

The Taliban apparently captured the district, some 400 kilometres (240 miles) northwest of the Afghan capital of Kabul, and began a campaign of terror, said Sibgatullah Zaki, a Pakistan-based spokesman for the Afghan opposition.

According to Zaki, Taliban soldiers swept through the district "dragged people from their homes, lined them up, and gunned them down."

In his letter to the UN secretary general, Abdullah, con-

demned what he called a barbaric act of genocide, and called on the UN to send a mission to Faryab to investigate the killings.

Most of the victims were Uzbeks, a minority ethnic groups that lives in the area, said Zaki.

The opposition claim follows a report last year that 2,000 Taliban soldiers were massacred by a former ally Uzbek warlord, Malik Pahlawan.



A life boat belonging to the Canberra, ship of Queen Elizabeth in background, is brought to beach, Tuesday, for dismantling at the Gadani beach, 45 kilometres from Karachi. A leading Pakistani shipbreaker paid 280 million rupees (6.36 million US dollars) for the Canberra. All fittings and fixture were removed from the ship and labourers are waiting for high tide to drag it for dismantling the ship.

— AP/UNB photo

India lacks money to protect its architectural heritages

NEW DELHI, India, Jan 7: China has its Great Wall and India has its walled capital city. The comparison ends there, reports AP.

While China is revamping its monument, a burgeoning population in India's capital has been chipping stone-by-stone at the wall that has bounded old parts of Delhi since the 17th century. Shantytowns dwarf what remains of the wall at many places in the Indian capital.

"History at his doorstep means very little to the average person overwhelmed by the concerns of housing, employment, food and water," said Pawan Verma, an expert on historical architecture.

People cart off stone for their own use or to sell for construction projects.

DV Sharma, a deputy director of the Archaeological Survey of India, the federal body responsible for thousands of monuments across the country, blames the damage on years of

neglect by the local government.

"Only 10 to 20 per cent of the wall remains. That will also go," he predicted.

White attention is paid to well-known monuments like the Taj Mahal, thousands of temples, mosques, tombs, mansions and ancient shrines have been demolished across India, as one of the poorest countries, it lacks the money to protect one of the world's richest architectural heritages.

New Delhi's Red Fort, an imposing citadel of red stone, receives a cursory sprucing up once a year, when it is the backdrop for nationally televised independence day celebrations.

What the cameras don't show, but what some 20,000 daily visitors see, is litter covering the ground, graffiti defacing marble pillars, unkempt gardens and crumbling plaster.

"It's badly maintained. I don't know how much damage the British did through neglect during colonial rule and how

much it has deteriorated since the British left," said Sean O'Malley, a Canadian visitor touring the citadel.

The Red Fort, which was built by the Moghul ruler Shah Jahan in the 17th century, is among 5,000 monuments overseen by the Archaeological Survey of India. The department's yearly budget of 850 million rupees (dollars 23.6 million) just isn't enough, said its director-general, Ajai Shankar.

"We plan to have one guard for each protected monument. At present, one guard is looking after two monuments," Shankar said.

While Shankar struggles to protect his 5,000 sites, five times that number fall outside federal oversight.

"The situation is pathetic in states where local governments take no interest in conserving the heritage," said OP Jain, who heads the New Delhi chapter of the private Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage.

Many such private groups have started repairing monuments on their own, especially in cities and at well-known tourist spots.

A private group bought a dilapidated fort near New Delhi from a former prince who couldn't maintain it and converted it into a 30-bed hotel after eight years of restoration.

The old mansions could also be used as art galleries and book shops," said Verma, who has written a book on neglected "havelis," or mansions.

The government set up a National Culture Fund last year to promote such private initiatives. The response so far has been lukewarm, but a beginning has been made.

The London-based Aga Khan Trust has promised dollars 200,000 and Oberoi, an Indian hotel chain, pledged dollars 50,000 for improvements to the 16th century Humayun's tomb, an early example of the Moghul style of which the greatest example is the Taj Mahal.