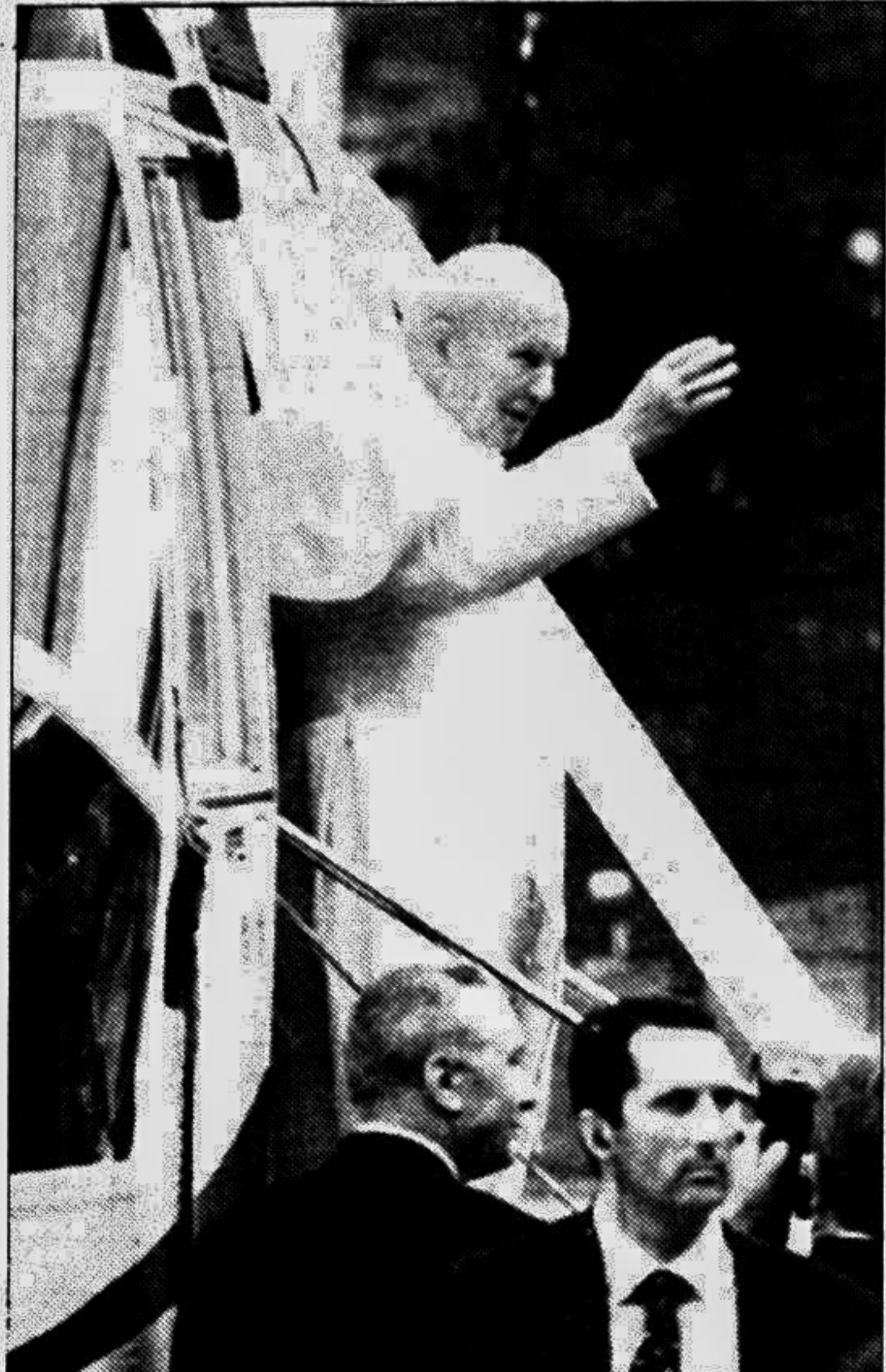


BRIEFLY



Pope John Paul II waves to well-wishers as he steps out of an Italian Air Force helicopter in Lerenzago, Wednesday to begin a 13-day vacation in this resort in the Italian Alps north of Venice. — AP/UNB photo

Algerian forces kill 7 militants: Algerian security forces killed seven Islamist rebels near the capital Algiers on Wednesday, the official APS news agency reported, Reuters says from Algiers.

US war games in Pacific begins: The largest US air exercise in the Pacific this year began yesterday at Alaskan bases, with the participation of Britain, Australia, Japan and Singapore, the Pentagon said Wednesday, AFP reports from Washington.

Turkish jet hits turbulence: At least seven passengers were injured when a Turkish airliner hit turbulence during a flight from Turkey to Japan, airport officials said yesterday, Reuters reports from Tokyo.

Militants raid Philippine village: Muslim extremist guerrillas raided a southern Philippines village killing a woman and then shot dead a policeman who went to the aid of casualties, television reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Manila.

Rains claim 170 in Chinese province: Heavy rains since the start of June have left 170 people dead and 12 missing in the southwest province of Sichuan, officials said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

Senegalese troops pound Bissau Airport: DAKAR, July 9: Senegalese troops backing Guinea Bissau President Joao Bernardo Vieira on Wednesday pounded the airport in the north of the capital Bissau which has been in rebel hands for a month, diplomats said here, reports AFP.

Camilla Parker meets Prince William: LONDON, July 9: Prince Charles's long-term lover Camilla Parker Bowles has met Prince William for the first time, British tabloid newspapers reported in their Thursday editions, reports Reuters.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: WASHINGTON, July 9: The United States said Wednesday it has entered the final phase of its effort to restart peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, with no breakthrough yet within sight, reports AFP.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: Department spokesman were the clearest indication yet from Washington that the administration was seeking to close a deal or scrap the proposals altogether.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: Abright's lengthy conversations with the leaders reinforced the view that the effort was near completion, requiring the personal involvement of the Secretary of State.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: Abright earlier this week indicated that progress has been made.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: "I think we are coming closer if we weren't coming closer, we would try a different track," Abright said in a CNN interview on Monday.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: The United States has been pressing Israel to pull out of an additional 13 per cent of the West Bank in a bid to revive peace talks with the Palestinians.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: Netanyahu has repeatedly rebuffed the US proposal but Abright has accepted it although it falls far short of the Palestinians' territorial aspirations.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: President Bill Clinton presented the package of ideas intended to launch negotiations on a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement during meetings with Netanyahu and Arafat in January.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: Meanwhile, unidentified attackers fired several shots Wednesday at a car owned by Israeli settlers in Hebron without causing any casualties, Israeli police said.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: The bullets hit a window and door of the vehicle near the tomb of the patriarchs, a holy site venerated by Jews and Muslims.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: Tensions are high in Hebron following a series of acts of vandalism against Palestinian cars and property by Israeli settlers.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: Some 400 settlers live in enclaves in the centre of the town, protected by hundreds of Israeli soldiers amid a population of 120,000 Palestinians.

US enters final phase of its effort to restart ME peace: The remarks from the State Department spokesman were the clearest indication yet from Washington that the administration was seeking to close a deal or scrap the proposals altogether.

Grenade attack on Cambodian minister's residence

PHNOM PENH, July 9: Two grenades were thrown this morning at the house of Cambodia's Justice Minister Chem Sngoun, but failed to explode, police witnesses said, reports AFP.

One grenade landed in the garage and the other was found by police outside the house, said household employee Srei Kosal.

"I was cleaning a car, suddenly I saw a grenade landing near it," said Srei Kosal, "then I ran out of the place but luckily it did not explode."

Chem Sngoun, a senior member of power and second Prime Minister Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party was not at home at the time of the attack.

He was in the eastern province of Svay Rieng to campaign for his party ahead of general elections on July 26.

BJP to mark N-tests in pop video

NEW DELHI, July 9: India's ruling Hindu nationalists are to celebrate the country's recent nuclear tests in a pop video, the Asian Age newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

The song, 'Hum Hain Indian' (We are Indian), is being backed financially by a Hindu nationalist legislator to "initiate a national celebration of India's nuclear status through the electronic media," the Age said.

The song will be aired on state-run Doordharshan television and satellite channels such as the Hong Kong-based Channel V and Sony TV. It will be released Friday by a leading Hindu nationalist state politician.

India's May 11 and 13 nuclear tests triggered a tit-for-tat riposte from arch-rival Pakistan along with worldwide condemnation, both countries now face international sanctions.

300 tribal activists stage protest march in India

NEW DELHI, July 9: About 300 tribal activists from eastern India, armed with bows and arrows, staged a protest march here today accusing the government of delaying on its pledge to create a new state for them, reports AFP.

The marchers shouted slogans against Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, accusing him of going back on his word.

A memorandum released by the marchers said "30 million souls" in the Jharkhand tribal area in the eastern state of Bihar felt "frustrated over the non-fulfilment of their five-decade-old demand for a separate state."

Senegalese troops pound Bissau Airport

DAKAR, July 9: Senegalese troops backing Guinea Bissau President Joao Bernardo Vieira on Wednesday pounded the airport in the north of the capital Bissau which has been in rebel hands for a month, diplomats said here, reports AFP.

The city itself was relatively calm and inhabitants began to move back into their homes, the sources said, adding however that armed rebels had been spotted sneaking into the city centre, raising fears of a new outbreak of fighting there.

Loyalist forces launched an all-out offensive using heavy artillery on Sunday in a bid to recapture Bissau Airport, which commands all roads to the interior of the country.

But they appeared no closer Wednesday to wresting it from the rebels, who have mined the site and possess mobile heavy artillery of their own.

Camilla Parker meets Prince William

LONDON, July 9: Prince Charles's long-term lover Camilla Parker Bowles has met Prince William for the first time, British tabloid newspapers reported in their Thursday editions, reports Reuters.

Top-selling newspapers The Sun and The Mirror both claimed world exclusives with reports of a historic meeting on June 12 between 16-year-old Prince William and Parker Bowles, whose adultery with Charles was blamed for breaking up his marriage to Princess Diana.

A spokeswoman at St James's Palace in London confirmed that William and Parker Bowles, who is now 50, had met.

"Yes Prince William and Mrs Parker Bowles have met. Meetings between the children and Mrs Parker Bowles are a private, family matter which we are not prepared to discuss," the spokeswoman said "we wish, for their sakes, the media will now leave this very personal matter alone," she added.

The meeting came less than a year after Princess Diana's sudden death in a car crash in Paris last August. Parker Bowles has remained discreetly in the shadows since that time.

The Sun said William had dropped by chance at St James's Palace where Parker Bowles has become a frequent visitor over the past year, and that the two had met twice since then.

Kosovo crisis NATO to use force if talks fail: Kinkel

TIRANA, July 9: German Foreign Minister Kalus Kinkel warned here Wednesday that NATO would use military force to resolve the crisis in Kosovo if negotiations failed, reports AFP.

"Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic must respect the conclusion of the Contract Group, or else the option of a military intervention by NATO will become a reality," he said.

Kinkel made his warning soon after arriving here from Bonn, where the Contract Group joining Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United States had called earlier Wednesday for an immediate ceasefire in Kosovo.

He said here that a ceasefire was necessary for negotiations to begin, adding that he wanted to see a political solution to the crisis in Kosovo, where ethnic Albanians are fighting for independence from Serbia, one of the two states of the rump Yugoslavia.

"We are in favour of autonomy for Kosovo and against its separation" from the Yugoslav state, he said.

Kinkel added that Milosevic "should know that all options are open to him and we expect him to use political means" to resolve the Kosovo crisis.

Meanwhile, after meeting with independence fighters from Kosovo, the United States suggested Tuesday that the radicals may not have a seat at the negotiating table if peace talks are launched with Belgrade.

It's up to Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova to decide who will be included in the negotiating team, said State Department spokesman James Rubin.

Rubin acknowledged that the views of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which is fighting to end Serbian rule over Kosovo, should be reflected, but that their direct participation in the talks was not required.

"They can have their views reflected without a seat at the table, meaning indirectly," said Rubin.

Whether it's direct or indirect ought to be up to Dr Rugova, not us," he said.

The United States appeared to be distancing itself from the KLA following several meetings over the past weeks intended to pave the way for a ceasefire and negotiations on autonomy for Kosovo within Yugoslavia.

The KLA has been gaining ground in Kosovo since Belgrade launched a crackdown on Kosovo in late February that has left hundreds dead and tens of thousands homeless.

The statements from Washington followed a stormy meeting of the six-nation Contract Group on the former Yugoslavia that failed to produce a consensus on whether the rebels should play a role in a peace settlement.

Russia has staunchly opposed any participation by the KLA, echoing Belgrade's view that the fighters are "terrorists" that have targeted Serb civilians living in the province, where 90 per cent of the population is ethnic Albanian.



Nancy Sinatra applauds First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton in Washington Wednesday during a news conference to announce a proposal to build a National Music Museum and Centre in Washington. The Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress, along with the Federal City Council, are exploring the possibility of building the museum. Federal City Council President Bob Dole is at left. — AP/UNB photo

Nigerian govt appeals for calm

LAGOS, July 9: Nigeria's military ruler appealed for calm on Wednesday after at least 19 people died in riots triggered by the death of detained opposition politician Moshood Abiola, reports Reuters.

General Abdulsalam Abubakar also dismissed the 34-member Cabinet of civilian and military ministers who deal with much of the day-to-day running of government business. The all-military ruling council was left untouched.

But in a broadcast address to Nigerians, Abubakar made no mention of concrete plans to restore democracy, or to release more political prisoners, which the international community and local political groups await impatiently.

The United States, Nigeria's biggest trading partner, called for the release of detainees and said a timetable to bring back civilian rule by October should be followed.

"I appeal to you all to be calm despite your understandable grief. Our national grief cannot be assuaged by recourse to lawlessness, threat to lives, and the want on destruction of innocent people's property," Abubakar said, a month after taking office following the sudden death of dictator Sani Abacha.

Abiola, jailed in 1994 after claiming the presidency on the strength of elections in 1993 which were annulled by the

army as he was poised for victory, died on Tuesday after being taken ill during a meeting with a visiting US delegation.

An official announcement attributed Abiola's death to a heart attack and American officials said there was no reason to suspect foul play.

But riots swept Lagos and other towns in southwestern Nigeria, with protesters accusing the military government, which is dominated by generals from the north, of murdering Abiola.

At least 19 people were confirmed dead by eye-witnesses, 11 of them in districts of Lagos where large numbers of northerners live.

AFP adds: The United States and Britain will send a team of pathologists to Nigeria to assist coroners in performing an autopsy on politician Moshood Abiola, who died of an apparent heart attack Tuesday, the State Department said.

"We have seen no evidence that chief Abiola died of anything other than natural causes," said State Department spokesman James Rubin.

The Nigerian government has offered to conduct the post-mortem under international supervision, he said.

"We are planning on sending two military pathologists and the British will send an expert as well," he said. Rubin said he

did not know when the autopsy would take place.

Another report says, Nigeria's ruling generals were huddled in talks late into the night, discussing how to manage their exit from power after dramatic events that left a plan to end decades of military rule in tatters, officials said.

"They have been meeting since about midday. They want to come up with a concrete format and timetable for their disengagement from power," a government source said.

The first and so far only outcome of the protracted meeting was Abubakar's sacking of the 34-member Cabinet of civilian and military ministers who deal with much of the day-to-day running of government business. The all-military Ruling Council was left untouched.

Many Nigerian analysts say Abubakar needs to move quickly on the key question of returning Nigeria to democracy, if he is not to lose the growing support he has enjoyed since taking over from the unpopular and uncompromising Abacha.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku, a Nigerian, who met both Abubakar and Abiola separately last week, said he believed Abubakar would win the support of Abiola followers if he were to come up with a credible civilian rule plan.

Polls campaign gains momentum in Japan

TOKYO, July 9: Leo Takano, singer and gay activist, wears a frock as he campaigns for election on Sunday to Japan's Upper House, delivering a message of individuality at a time of worrying recession, reports AFP.

"However much people may at jeer me, I don't mind," said 48-year-old Takano, "I'm confident I can hug everyone."

His small but colourful sports and peace party is one of a few of similar style that remain from the 1980s and early 1990s boom in political groups of all hues that sprang up to contest elections.

Nearly all have disappeared, along with Japan's economic prosperity.

Takano, whose short blond hair and penchant for skirts wins him attention on the hustings delivers a strong message to the young in Japan's rigidly structured society.

"Don't be like robots, which only obey orders from organisations and have no will to act for themselves," he said.

Takano said his party, founded in 1989 by professional wrestling star Kanji "Antonio" Inoki, will "contribute to world peace through sports diplomacy" if it defies predictions and wins a seat in Sunday's polls.

Inoki went to Baghdad in 1991 to campaign for the release of hostages in the Gulf War and held an unusual sports festival in the north Korean capital of Pyongyang in 1995.

Takano wants to bring ordinary people into political life. "If you assume parliament is where you do business, then you must attach most importance to the customers, the people of the country," he said.

"All people should get due respect," he said, regardless of occupation or social background.

Takano, divorced more than 15 years ago, raised his four daughters alone and now has three grandchildren.

Sunday's elections are for half of the 252-seat Upper House of councillors, fifty of the seats are to be decided by proportional representation, where small parties stand the most chance.

Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto's ruling Liberal Democratic Party is expected to win the largest number of seats, though it may fall short of its much-wanted majority in the chamber.

Myanmar junta issues fresh warning to NLD

YANGON, July 9: Myanmar's military government today issued a new warning to the opposition that their activities would land them in trouble, reports Reuters.

State-run newspapers said: "There is ample evidence that the National League for Democracy (NLD) has committed political, economic and social conspiracies with reliance on the international colonialist bloc."

The papers, regarded as a mouthpiece of the ruling government, said Myanmar would not be shaken by opposition attempts to stir disorder in the country "through concoctions and rumours."

A government statement obtained by Reuters on Wednesday accused the opposition of spreading rumours that violent unrest could be expected in Myanmar on Martyr's Day on July 19 and on August 8, the 10th anniversary of student street protests in 1988 which the military crushed.

On Tuesday, security officials stopped NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and three other NLD Party members travelling with her by car at Shwe Mya

Yar village, about 80 km north of Yangon.

The junta prevented Suu Kyi from continuing further north to Min Hla township to meet another party member.

Suharto denies accusations of critics

JAKARTA, July 9: Former President Suharto has denied accusations by critics that he has money stashed away in overseas banks, reports AP.

The 77-year-old former leader, who resigned in May following protests and riots, said that if the allegations were proved, he would hand the money over to the state.

"I don't have any accounts abroad at all," Suharto said in a statement released Thursday by Yayasan Dharmas, one of several charity foundations he heads.

Under Suharto, foundations linked to him reaped a special tax on civil servants and enjoyed other privileges.

Off the Record

Queen's wicked impersonation

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II renowned for her stern public image, entertained an audience by mimicking Northern Ireland's firebrand Protestant politician, the Reverend Ian Paisley, the British press reported Thursday, says AFP.

A civic leader in Edinburgh who recently met the Queen at an official reception revealed in her weekly column in a local paper that the British monarch had carried out a "wicked" impersonation of Paisley, several London newspapers reported.

Vice-convenor of Edinburgh City Council Susan Dalgety wrote: "I was one of a group of councillors who met her last week during her visit and — to my surprise — she was friendly, funny and very well-informed. She also does a pretty wicked impersonation of the Reverend Ian Paisley."

Buckingham Palace, embarrassed by the revelation, gave a disdainful response. "We do not comment on private conversations between the Queen and other people," a spokeswoman said.



Fighting fire with fire

PIERSON, Florida: Florida is fighting fire with fire in fern country, reports AP.

A helicopter on Wednesday dropped hundreds of pingpong balls filled with anti-freeze and a flammable chemical on volatile scrub forest in hopes of protecting 8,000 acres of valuable timber and farm land in Volusia County.

The so-called controlled burn of 600 acres also would prevent another mass evacuation of larger cities to the east of this tiny town of just 1,400 people located 48 km west of Daytona Beach.

Seventy to 80 per cent of the fires burning around the borders of Flagler, St Johns and Volusia counties were contained, but none was considered extinguished. That's why firefighters were making sure the fires didn't spread into Pierson, self-proclaimed fern capital of the world.

Annan urges negotiators to finalise work on criminal court

UNITED NATIONS, July 9: Concerned that time is running out, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged negotiators Wednesday to finalise work on creating the world's first permanent war crimes tribunal, reports AP.

Negotiators from over 150 countries have been attending a conference in Rome since June 15 to try to create the court that would try war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The marathon conference is set to end on July 17.

In a letter to the president of the conference, Giovanni Conso, Annan said he appreciated that everyone was working hard and would spare no effort to make the court a reality.

"Time is nevertheless running short," Annan said.

"I would therefore like to convey to you and to the conference my sincere hope that the participating states will find the necessary spirit of cooperation in order to be able to finalise the statute on July 17 with a view to creating a court which is strong and independent enough to carry out its

task," Annan wrote.

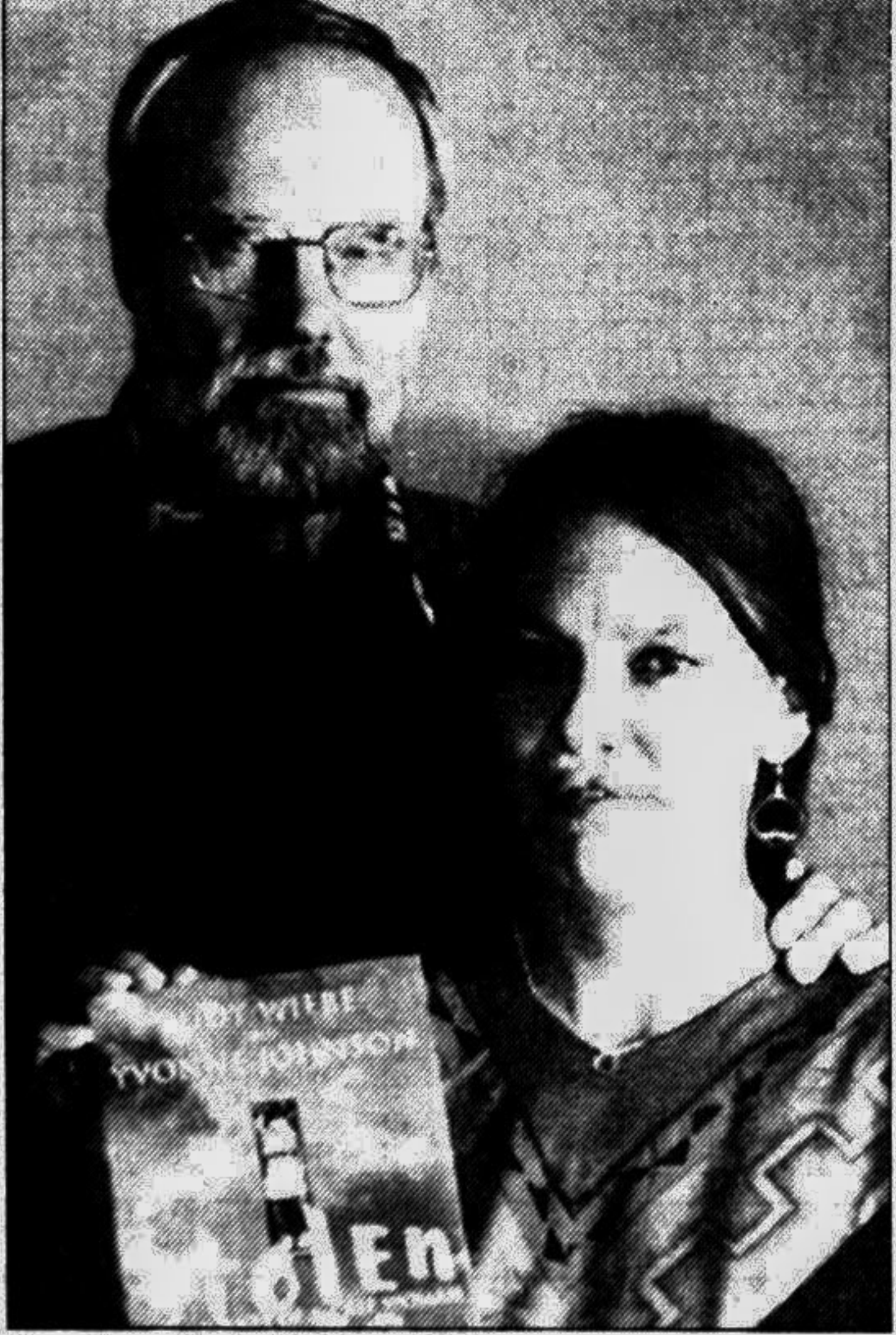
One especially deep divide among the negotiators is whether the court should have a prosecutor free to open investigations on his or her own. The United States is firmly opposed to the idea, arguing that cases should come from individual states or the Security Council.

In his letter, the UN chief outlined what he said should be the goals of a permanent court.

"The overriding interest must be that of the victims, and of the international community as a whole," Annan wrote.

"The court must be an instrument of justice, not expedience. It must be able to protect the weak against the strong. It must demonstrate that an international conscience is a reality."

The idea of an international criminal court dates back to the Nuremberg war crimes tribunals of World War II. The idea was revived a few years ago amid the horrors in Bosnia and Rwanda — for which ad hoc courts have been formed to prosecute war criminals.



Co-authors Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson are pictured as they launched their new book titled "Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman" on June 19 at the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge near Maple Creek, Saskatchewan. Johnson, the great-great granddaughter of a renowned Cree chief, was raped while still a toddler, abused throughout her youth, convicted at 27 of a role in a brutal killing and is now the only Indian woman in Canada serving a life sentence for murder. The book is now winning accolades across Canada. — AP/UNB photo