

Statute adopted for setting up Int'l Criminal Court

ROME, July 18: A large majority of countries here Friday adopted a statute setting up the world's first court to try those accused of the most serious crimes despite objections from the United States and others, reports AFP.

Capping five weeks of tough negotiations by 160 countries, 120 voted for the International Criminal Court (ICC), while seven voted against and 21 abstained, twelve did not take part in the vote.

The court will be set up in The Hague once the statute is ratified by 60 countries.

The court, whose statute is a compromise between supporters and opponents of strong and independent institution, will judge war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression, Amnesty International commented, "while recognising that this court could be an historic step forward for international justice the statute still requires radical surgery to ensure that the court will be just, relevant and effective."

The United States voted against the statute because "We do not accept the concept of universal jurisdiction or the application of a statute to non-party states," said the chief US delegate to the conference David Scheffter.

Israel also voted against considering that a paragraph of the statute likened the Israeli settlement on Palestinian territories to a war crime.

The Americans are concerned that if they do not sign the statute, they will still not be able to prevent US citizens being tried before the proposed international tribunal.

Washington fears that US troops engaged in peace operations around the world will be under constant threat of legal action for political reasons.

The United States wanted limited independence for the court making it answerable to the UN Security Council where it has veto power.

Unlike the international tribunals on former Yugoslavia and Rwanda set up to judge events that took place over a determined time scale and in a specified region, the ICC will sit permanently and will cover the whole world.

Crimes that previously went unpunished since no rules were laid down for pursuit of their perpetrators can be judged by the ICC — these include sex crimes, torture and enslavement but there was no agreement on inclusion of terrorism and drug trafficking.

As debate wound up Friday, the European Union found itself in opposition to China, India, Russia and the United States. The United States, China, France and Russia four of the five UN Security Council's permanent members want limited independence for the court seeking to make it answerable to the council.

The fifth permanent Security Council member Britain and most countries have advocated a fully independent court. Before adopting the statute the conference rejected last minute amendments proposed by India and the United States.

India had again insisted that weapons of mass destruction including nuclear chemical and biological weapons be included in the list of weapons whose use constituted a war crime. The conference also rejected a US amendment which would have made it impossible for the future court to try citizens from countries which had not signed up to the ICC.

The thorniest issues delegates had to decide on for the ICC's statute included the question of which crimes would

Violence continues in Karachi 3 more killed, vehicles set on fire

KARACHI, July 18: Gunmen roamed the troubled eastern neighbourhoods of Karachi on Saturday killing three people, setting vehicles on fire and shutting down shops, said eyewitnesses and police officials, reports AP.

The gunmen belonged to rival factions of a militant ethnic group known as the Mohajir Qami Movement (MQM) which represents Indian Muslims who settled in Pakistan after 1947.

The violence followed a strike call by the smaller faction known as the Haqiqi group, which is protesting the killing of several of its activists.

Since June 1 the feuding factions have killed more than 200 people in Karachi, terrorized thousands more and generated scenes of anarchy in some of the worst hit neighbourhoods, like Korangi in the east and Liaqatabad in central Karachi.

During the night gunmen set fire to more than 20 vehicles, most of them in the Korangi area where the Haqiqi faction dominates, said residents of the area.

The main combatants in the feud are rivals belonging to the Haqiqi faction and the larger group run by Altaf Hussain, who lives in self-imposed exile in Britain. A third faction recently entered the fray.

In recent days, policemen have swarmed through the city arresting scores of people. Altaf Sheikh, who represents the Hussein faction, said at least 250 of its members have been arrested in recent days.

The battles are largely territorial with rival groups fighting for control of entire neighbourhoods.

In central Liaqatabad even the police and paramilitary Rangers patrol only in armoured vehicles.

Throughout Karachi on Saturday police in helmets and bullet proof vests as well as the Rangers manned cement barricades surrounded by sandbags.

Most of the barricades were established in the troubled areas, but eyewitnesses said there were a few sandbag bunkers in even the post-tense locations of the city like Clinton area which runs along the Arabian Sea coast and his home to the city's wealthiest, including former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

The movement, which was established decades ago, has been demanding more rights for Indian immigrants to Pakistan. The movement wants mohajirs or refugees recognised as a fifth ethnic group in Pakistan, like Pathans, Punjabis, Sindhis and Baluch.

BRIEFLY

10 die in Ukrainian air crash: Ten people were killed when a Ukrainian Defence Ministry cargo aircraft crashed Friday in the African nation of Eritrea, a ministry official said, Xinhua reports from Kiev, Ukraine.

The accident, at 7:10 pm local life happened when the Ilyushin-78 plane, chartered by a Bulgarian company, was making a landing approach at Asmara airport.

Crime rate drops in Vietnam: Major crimes in Vietnam fell in the first six months of the year, although organised crime, juvenile offences and corruption cases continued to rise, the Communist Party newspaper Nhan Dan reported yesterday, AP says from Hanoi.

Murder, robbery, child kidnapping and attacks on officials all declined, it quoted Police Chief Truong Huu Quoc as saying.

Two more tremors shake Taiwan: Two tremors rattled eastern Taiwan yesterday less than a day after a strong earthquake on the island killed five people, flattened homes and cut off roads, the central weather bureau said, AFP reports from Taipei.

No casualties or damage were immediately reported from the two tremors measuring 4.9 and 4.2 on the Richter Scale, the bureau said.

12 feared buried in Austrian mine: Up to 12 rescuers were feared buried while searching for a miner trapped by a cave-in Friday at Talkumbergbau Lassing mine in southern Austria, the Red Cross said early yesterday, AFP reports from Vienna.

Red Cross official Ewald Bauer said 11 or 12 rescue workers had been reported missing while seeking for the 24-year-old miner. It was feared they had also been buried.

Dissident held in China: Outspoken Chinese dissident Mao Guoliang has been arrested in the latest escalation of a crackdown against the newborn pro-democracy opposition party, dissident sources said yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

Tidal wave hits PNG: Up to 20 people may have died and at least 100 are missing after a tidal wave struck a remote area of the Papua New Guinea northwest coast, emergency relief officials said yesterday, AP says from Papua New Guinea.

The seven-metre high wave hit the coast near the town of Aitape in the West Sepik province on Friday night following an earthquake off the coast of magnitude seven.

Emergency extended in Chechnya: Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov on Friday ordered an extension to a state of emergency and curfew imposed in late June, to allow a continued crackdown against criminals in the breakaway republic, AFP reports from Moscow.

The state of emergency, introduced on June 24 and due to finish on July 15, has been extended by a further 10 days, Interfax reported citing the Chechen Presidency.

Yeltsin begins summer vacation: President Boris Yeltsin begins his annual summer vacation yesterday at a lakeside resort in the northern Russian region of Karelia where he spent part of last summer, the Kremlin announced, AP reports from Moscow.

The 67-year-old president, whose health is a constant concern, appeared tired Friday at the burial ceremony for Russia's last Czar, Alexander II. Although he delivered a strong and stirring speech, he was the only person in the cathedral who sat during portions of the service.

Nepal bus accident claims 19: At least 19 people were killed when a bus plunged down a ravine on Friday, state-run radio said, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

In the accident, 16 people died on the spot while three died on their way to the local hospital, the radio said. Thirteen people were also injured in the accident.

1 executed in Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia executed one of its citizens on Friday for stabbing to death an Egyptian during a jewellery store robbery, state television reported, Reuters says from Riyadh.

The execution raised to at least 16 the number of people put to death in the kingdom so far this year.

Death toll now 75

Flood situation in Assam remains critical

GUWAHATI, July 18: The flood situation in Assam remained critical yesterday with the number of affected persons rising to over 2.5 million in 19 districts of the state, official sources said, reports PTI.

Seventy-five people have so far lost their lives in the devastating floods in the state. Fifty one of them died in landslides and 24 were either carried away or drowned in the swirling waters, the sources said.

The sources said in worst-hit Dhemaji water levels of its rivers are receding but rail and road communication continued to be disrupted even after a month.

In Golaghat district, where 46 villages have been affected by the floods, the situation has remained unchanged. However, the situation in Bokakhat subdivision in the district was improving.

The sources said the water level of river Subansiri is rising in north Lakhimpur district, where seven people have been killed, including one who was drowned recently.

In upper Assam's Sibsagar district two persons were drowned in the last two weeks, while the situation in Darrang, Morigaon, Barpeta and Goalpara was improving, the sources said.

In Dhubri district water level of river Brahmaputra is receding but road communication from Dhubri to Bishwanagar and Golokgan to Kachakhana has remained disrupted due to floods, the sources said.

The large number of residents of 99 villages of the district continued to receive aid from the administration, the sources said.

In south Salmara and Mankachar sub-division 158 villages have been affected and the inhabitants have taken shelter on highlands and roads.

Engine boats have been pressed into service in relief and rescue operation for 30 families of Mankachar circle who are now sheltering at Haldiganj in neighbouring Meghalaya, the sources said.



President Clinton signs an Executive Memorandum Friday concerning protecting America's youth from tobacco at a White House ceremony honouring the 1998 Girls Nation class. With the president are at left, Alana Aldag, president of Girls Nation and Jennifer Hall, right, the vice president of Girls Nation. — AP/UNB photo

Int'l community can help accelerate process of dialogue with govt: Suu Kyi

BANGKOK, July 18: Myanmar pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has called on the international community to support her demand that the Parliament elected in 1990 be allowed to convene by Aug 21, reports AP.

"The international community can do a lot to help accelerate the process of dialogue if they have the will to do so," said Suu Kyi in an interview with AL TSEAN, a Southeast Asian non-government organisation supporting the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar, also known as Burma.

"The first thing they can do is to support the convening of our Parliament," said Suu Kyi in the taped interview seen here Saturday.

The demand looks unlikely to break the deadlock between Nobel Peace laureate Suu Kyi and the military government.

It marked the first time the National League for Democracy had set a deadline for the military to convene Parliament. It was unclear what would happen if the ruling council of generals refused to comply, as is likely.

The Parliament was formed following a landslide victory of the league in the 1990 general elections. But the military refused to convene the body and moved to crush Suu Kyi's supporters.

"We are only asking for what is due to the people of Myanmar. That should not be looked upon as a provocation or a confrontation, particularly in view of the fact that we have waited patiently for eight years," said Suu Kyi.

The military, which has ruled Myanmar since 1962, said in a press statement Friday that "dissidents, criminal and terrorist groups" from abroad and within the country are trying to create an "imaginary scenario where Myanmar has become a nation about to explode with political tension, ethnic rebellion, economic turmoil and social unrest and the only way to prevent the explosion from happening is for the government to have a dialogue with the NLD."

In 1995, the NLD walked out of a constitution-drafting assembly it said was rigged in favour of prolonged military rule. The body has not met since March 1996.

Suu Kyi, who vaulted to prominence during anti-government protests in 1988 that were bloodily suppressed, has been under house arrest or close confinement for most of the last nine years. Hundreds of her supporters are in jail.

"The economic situation is bad as you well know. Education system is bad, health care is poor, so what do we have left?" said Suu Kyi in the interview. "Our idea of dialogue is a way forward and out of the problems."

A government crackdown has decimated the NLD since the 1990 poll victory. A quarter of the victors have been imprisoned or exiled. Two have died in prison.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair shakes hands with well-wishers, during a visit to Dundee, Scotland, Friday. Blair was in Scotland to bolster support for his Labour Party in the face of an upswing of nationalist feeling, and the rising fortunes of the Scottish National Party, as Scotland moves towards its own parliament. — AP/UNB photo

Bodo militants kill 7 police personnel in Assam

GUWAHATI, July 18: Bodo militants have killed seven Assam police personnel including an assistant commandant in an ambush in lower Assam's Kokrajhar district, official reports reaching here today said, reports PTI.

The ultras waylaid the police party Friday night at Jharbari under Sarangpur police station and fired indiscriminately when it was returning to its Bismarri camp.

The extremists then torched the police vehicle and looted four rifles, a pistol, a carbine and some ammunition, the reports said.

A manhunt has been launched to track down the ultras.

Third candidate joins race for Japanese premiership

TOKYO, July 18: Junichiro Koizumi, the colourful third candidate for Japan's premiership, hopes to add fuel to a national debate on how to pull the country out of the economic malaise which doomed the last government, reports AFP.

But Koizumi, the Health Minister, is regarded by many analysts more as a choice thrown up by factional power politics than as a serious bet to succeed Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto who resigned Monday.

Koizumi joined the fray, typical of infighting that has marked the 43-year history of the Liberal Democratic Party, late Friday as the top front-runners. Foreign Minister Keizo Uchiha and ageing conservative stalwart Seiroku Kajiyama, outlined their platforms.

"It can be said that the leadership election has become a little bit interesting," the major newspaper Mainichi said today.

"The countries of the world and the financial and stock markets are keeping a close watch on how the election goes."

Writer of play on Gandhi's assassin to challenge in court if it is banned

BOMBAY, July 18: The author of a controversial play about a man who assassinated Indian independence leader Mohandas Gandhi said Saturday he would challenge in court any government order banning his play, reports AP.

Producers cancelled the play on Friday after hundreds of protesters battled with police outside the theatre and blocked the people from watching the performance in central Bombay.

The Hindu nationalist coalition government of Maharashtra state, of which Bombay is the capital, is expected to take a decision later in the day on a suggestion made by the federal government to ban the play.

Federal Interior Minister Lal Krishna Advani asked the state government to shut down the play after lawmakers in parliament complained that the play denigrates Gandhi, known as Mahatma (a great soul) and glorifies his killer, Nathuram Godse.

Playwright Pradeep Dalvi said he had a strong case since the play was cleared by state censors without any cuts. "I wrote the play because it was a challenging subject. No light has been shed on the man who killed Gandhi for 50 years. ... Let people be the judge," Dalvi told The Associated Press.

Dalvi had challenged in court a ban on the play first imposed in 1987 by the then state government run by Congress Party. But he withdrew his petition after censors cleared the play last year when the new right-wing BJP-Shiv Sena government came to power.

Republicans postpone attempt to override veto on US sanctions bill

WASHINGTON, July 18: Congressional Republicans have stopped trying to override President Bill Clinton's veto of a bill that would have imposed sanctions on companies that aid Iran's weapons programmes, reports AP.

But House Speaker Newt Gingrich says he will reschedule such an attempt if the administration fails to follow through with penalties on nine Russian enterprises.

Republican leaders on Friday indefinitely postponed the override vote, even though supporters of the rejected measure had far more than the two-thirds majorities needed in each chamber for an override.

The sanctions legislation had passed the House 392-22 in May and the Senate 90-4 in June.

Gingrich, a Republican from Georgia, suggested the legislation was unnecessary after the administration earlier this week said it would use existing laws to impose the sanctions on the Russian companies.

The administration action, and Friday's suspension of the override vote, followed a meeting earlier this week involving Gingrich, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, a Republican from Mississippi, and White House national security adviser Sandy Berger.

"We said flatly we were going to override the veto of the Iran sanctions bill this week. And I was delighted when, by Wednesday, suddenly, magically, overnight, they got things done we've been asking for over a year," Gingrich said.

In announcing the sanctions, the White House said the nine enterprises were found to be aiding weapons programmes in Iran, Libya and North Korea. At the same time, the Russian government announced its own investigation into the nine enterprises for export-law violations.

The US actions included trade restriction and cutoff of American assistance. Republican aides said that Lott originally wanted to go ahead with a vote but that Gingrich believed that withholding an override vote would give the United States additional leverage over Moscow.

In any event, "The bill's been pulled," said John Czwartacki, a Lott spokesman.

Although the legislation would impose sanctions on any nations exporting missile technology to Iran, it was aimed mainly at Russia.

Habibie won't intervene Military asked to deal with kidnapping case

JAKARTA, July 18: Indonesian President B J Habibie Saturday called on the military to deal with allegations that members of an elite army division abducted pro-democracy activists, reports AP.

Speaking to reporters, Habibie expressed confidence in the legal system of the military and said he would not intervene in the case, despite calls from human rights groups for a full and open inquiry.

"The government will leave it to the armed forces to settle the problem," he said.

On Friday, Lt. Gen. Prabowo Subianto, a son-in-law of former President Suharto and the former commander of the military's crack Kopassus group, said he was ready to take responsibility for the kidnappings if they were proven.

This week military police arrested seven Kopassus soldiers accusing them of taking the activists captive. Courts-martial are expected to be convened soon.

Prabowo, a controversial figure within the powerful military, said he would await the results of a military investigation of the kidnappings, which occurred in the weeks before Suharto quit in May after 32 years in power.

Some activists, who are now free, have testified to Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission that they were abducted by masked men, tortured and questioned about their political activities.

Other human rights groups say as many as 24 activists were abducted and that at least nine remain missing.

Human rights activists have accused top military brass of ordering the abductions and have called for investigations of Prabowo and other senior officials.

Floods claim 1000 lives in China

BEIJING, July 18: Devastating floods across much of China this summer have killed 1,000 people and caused a scare over the giant Three Gorges Dam Project, state media said today, reports Reuters.

Flooding that started in June had affected more than 140 million people, destroyed 2.9 million houses and ruined nine million hectares (22 million acres) of crops by July 15, the China Daily said. Direct economic losses were estimated at more than 85.6 billion yuan (10.3 billion dollars), the newspaper said.

The vast majority of deaths resulted from drownings, collapsing houses and lightning, the Xinhua news agency quoted an official with the Ministry of Civil Affairs as saying in an overnight report.

On Friday, China said the floods were behind an 11 per cent drop in the summer grain harvest and had shaved 0.4 per centage point off first-half economic growth.

A separate commentary in the China Daily said natural disasters, including floods, earthquakes and snowstorms, were expected to cost China as much as 250 billion yuan a year through the end of the century.

The floods also sparked a brief scare over China's 29 billion dollars Three Gorges Dam as project officials braced for a massive crest of water rushing down the Yangtze river.

California church ordered to pay \$30m in sexual abuse case

SAN FRANCISCO, July 18: The Catholic diocese of Stockton, California, of covering up the molestation of children, has been ordered to pay \$30 million dollars to two brothers who claim that a priest had abused them sexually for years, reports AP.

The court-ordered award this week in the city east of San Francisco, is the most the church has ever been ordered to pay in a sexual abuse case in California.