

International

BRIEFLY

Govt-rebel clash leaves 5 dead in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, July 20: Government forces and Muslim separatists clashed in troubled Kashmir near the disputed India-Pakistan border, killing at least five combatants, police said Monday, reports AP.

Sunday night's encounter started with government forces raiding a jungle hide-out of the militants. A three-hour gun battle killed three soldiers and two militants, a police officer said on condition of anonymity.

At least four rebels may have escaped into Pakistan, police said. India accuses Pakistan of arming and training militants in India's share of Kashmir, a charge Islamabad denies.

ROK to withdraw 5 more intelligence agents from Russia

SEOUL, July 20: Five South Koreans are being withdrawn from Russia under an agreement to limit the number of intelligence agents each country assigns to its diplomatic missions, Seoul's Foreign Ministry said Monday, reports AP.

The withdrawal is in accordance with an agreement between the intelligence authorities of both countries. Foreign Ministry spokesman Lee Ho-jin told reporters.

Lee said the agreement will limit the number of intelligence officials each country will keep in its diplomatic missions in the other's territory to two.

Lee hoped that the agreement would resolve a diplomatic row which began early this month when each country expelled on diplomat on charges of spying.

In negotiations that followed, Russia acknowledged that it has two intelligence agents at its embassy in Seoul and proposed that South Korea limit to two the number of its intelligence officials in Russia.

South Korea accepted the proposal, Lee said, and has ordered the withdrawal of two agents from its embassy in Moscow and three from its consulate in Vladivostok.

Strong earthquake strikes Tibet: 9 die in road accident in Argentina

An earthquake with a magnitude of 6.1 struck Shigatse county in central Tibet yesterday morning, but there were no reports of damage or injuries, the Central Seismology Bureau said, AP reports from Beijing.

The quake struck at 9:05 am (0105 GMT), with its epicentre located in the lower part of the Tibetan plateau about 400 kilometres east of the provincial capital Lhasa, seismologists said. A magnitude 6 earthquake can cause severe damage.

9 die in road accident in Argentina: Nine young people died Sunday when the truck they were travelling in spun out of control and plunged into a water-filled ditch, police said, AP reports from Buenos Aires.

The nine — who ranged in age from 14 to 22 — were returning home from a dance along with six other friends who survived the accident, police said. Seven of the victims drowned, while the other two died of injuries they received in the crash.

Lawmaker commits suicide in Japan: A regional lawmaker committed suicide after apparently failing to secure enough votes for a ruling party candidate in elections to Japan's Parliament, police and newspaper reports said yesterday, AP reports from Tokyo.

Junji Kaneko, a police spokesman in Mitsuake, a city in Niigata prefecture, or state, said prefectural legislator Susumu Nishikawa, 55, hanged himself from a clothes line at his home early Sunday.

2 Iranians, Lankan hanged in Kuwait: Two Iranian men were hanged in Kuwait on Sunday, the first executions ever for drug smuggling in this small Gulf state, a Kuwaiti official said, AP reports from Kuwait.

A third man, a Sri Lankan identified as Yassin Bawa Abdul-Ghafour, was executed for murdering his lover, said the Interior Ministry official, who spoke on customary condition of anonymity.

Duma Speaker in Ankara: The speaker of Russian parliament's lower house, or Duma, arrived in Ankara Sunday for a three-day official visit to Turkey, the Anatolia News Agency reported, AFP says from Ankara.

Gennady Seleznyov told reporters at the airport he was willing to discuss the controversial Russian sale of S-300 missiles to the Republic of Cyprus with Turkish leaders if the issue was raised in the talks.

Captors free boy in Philippines: A 17-year-old Catholic boy was freed by Muslim captors hours after he was kidnapped in the southern Philippines, police said yesterday, AP reports from Philippines.

Police Sgt. Jun Trumata said Joel Esteban was released late Sunday, hours after he was taken by unidentified men in the port city of Zamboanga. Two of Esteban's friends who were with him during the abduction were not taken and were unharmed.

Death toll in Philippines landslide 7: The bodies of two remaining missing people — a 7-year-old girl and a woman — have been found in a landslide in the southern Philippines, bringing the death toll to seven, police said yesterday, AP says from Philippines.

The bodies were recovered late Sunday and the search for more victims has been called off in Sergio Osmena town in Zamboanga del Norte province, provincial police director Ronald Roderos said.

Fresh quake shakes E Taiwan: A fresh earthquake shook eastern Taiwan yesterday, as the island struggled to repair damage from a bigger tremor three days earlier which killed five people, the central weather bureau said, AFP reports from Taipei.

No casualties or damages were reported after yesterday's quake, measuring 4.9 on the Richter Scale, which struck at 1:58 am (1758 GMT Sunday). It originated 50.1 kilometres south of Hualien and 26.7 kilometres below the earth's surface.

Comedy actress Marsden dies: Veteran comedy actress Betty Marsden died at the age of 79, her daughter said on Sunday, AFP reports from London.

The star of the 1960s BBC radio series round the hour had been suffering from heart problems and pneumonia but appeared to have made a strong recovery. Her daughter, Lindsay Morgan, said Marsden died suddenly in the bar of the actors' benevolent fund home in Ruislip, northwest London, on Saturday night.

Death toll may reach 3000 Tidal wave ravages PNG

SISSANO, Papua New Guinea, July 20: Bodies, shattered coconut palms and the remains of flimsy huts floated off the shores of this Pacific nation after a crashed into three villages. The death toll Monday was at least 700, but could rise to 3,000 people, reports AP.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation quoted John Tekwi, governor of West Sepik Province, as saying the 3,000 figure was "conservative." Shortly before that, Papua New Guinea's national radio quoted provincial officials as saying the toll could top 2,000.

There was no warning before the 7-metre wall of water crashed into the northwest coast of Papua New Guinea, a nation on the island of New Guinea north of Australia.

The devastating wave, known as a tsunami, shattered the region Friday after a magnitude-7 earthquake.

On Monday, many survivors were in shock. Rescue officials said they expected to have a better idea later Monday on the death toll.

Entire villages have disappeared. The village of Arop was built on a sand spit and had a population of about 2,000 people. It no longer exists. There are no people to be seen. Three other villages have also been destroyed.

"There was nothing left except for coconut trees," said resident Lusien Romme, whose wife was killed. Romme, who broke two fingers and injured his ribs and shoulder, told Australian Associated Press by telephone from his bed at Aitape's Raihu Health Centre.

Romme said he saw "the sea rising up and coming toward me" before he was hurled into a coconut tree and then into the Sissano lagoon.

Meanwhile, the first of three Royal Australian Air Force C-130 transports arrived at Vanimo on Monday with emergency supplies including a field hospital and a 100-strong team of doctors, nurses and engineers.

"Our first Hercules transport aircraft landed this morning at Vanimo and that hospital is beginning to function and treat casualties," Australian defence department spokesman Colonel Keith Jobson said in Canberra.

Jobson said up to 700 people had been buried and hundreds of people were injured, mostly with multiple fractures. He said sanitation equipment had been sent to make water supplies safe.

"Until those missing come out of the bush, if indeed they do come out of the bush, it is very difficult to determine how many were actually killed," he said.

"Several villages were completely washed out to sea and there is no trace left at all. The prime concern at the moment is to treat the injured and of course provide the survivors, those that were uninjured with food, water and shelter."

New Zealand is sending a Hercules aircraft with relief supplies and another medical team.

Vanimo, the main administrative centre is about 96 km west of the area wiped out by the tsunami.

Stalemate in peace negotiations Israelis, Palestinians to hold fresh talks

TEL AVIV, July 20: Trying to breathe new life into the withering peace process, senior Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have agreed to a round of talks aimed at ending 16-month of stalemate, reports AP.

Sunday's meeting between Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Yasser Arafat's deputy Mahmoud Abbas did not yield a breakthrough. But after three hours, both men sounded determined to go forward and set up teams to tackle issues blocking a long overdue Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank. More talks were scheduled Monday.

An aide to Mordechai said both US peace envoy Dennis Ross and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had been briefed by phone immediately after the meeting.

"We have discussed all the outstanding issues, dealt with them from all their aspects and we will follow up in order to hear more ideas, hoping that such an endeavor will lead to a

bridging of the sides," Abbas said after the meeting at a Tel Aviv hotel.

"We decided in the coming days to concentrate on the main issues, and to look for solutions to bridge the gaps with the idea of moving forward to agreements between the sides," Mordechai said.

The meeting came at the behest of the United States, which called on the sides to negotiate directly after the American administration failed to resolve differences over an initiative calling for Israel to withdraw from another 13 per cent of the West Bank.

The Palestinians currently have full of partial control over 27 per cent of the territory.

After months of mediation, the United States presented a proposal in January calling for Israel to carry out a promised West Bank pullback, while the Palestinians would make greater efforts to fight terrorism.

US envoy arrives in Delhi to discuss N-issue

NEW DELHI, July 20: President Bill Clinton's envoy closeted himself in talks with a top aide to Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Monday in an attempt to narrow the nuclear policy gap between Washington and New Delhi, reports AP.

The talks, the third round between US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Indian foreign policy adviser Jaswant Singh, are at such a sensitive

stage that neither side is willing to say anything about them. At their second round of talks in Frankfurt, Germany earlier this month, the venue wasn't disclosed, allowing the two to avoid reporters.

Monday, they posed for photographers before beginning their meetings at a government guest house in New Delhi.

Talbott and Singh first met in Washington in June, soon after India and neighbouring

Pakistan set off a series of tit-for-tat underground nuclear tests. India and Pakistan have fought three wars since both gained independence from Britain in 1947, and their shared frontier remains tense, raising fears in Washington of a nuclear conflagration in South Asia.

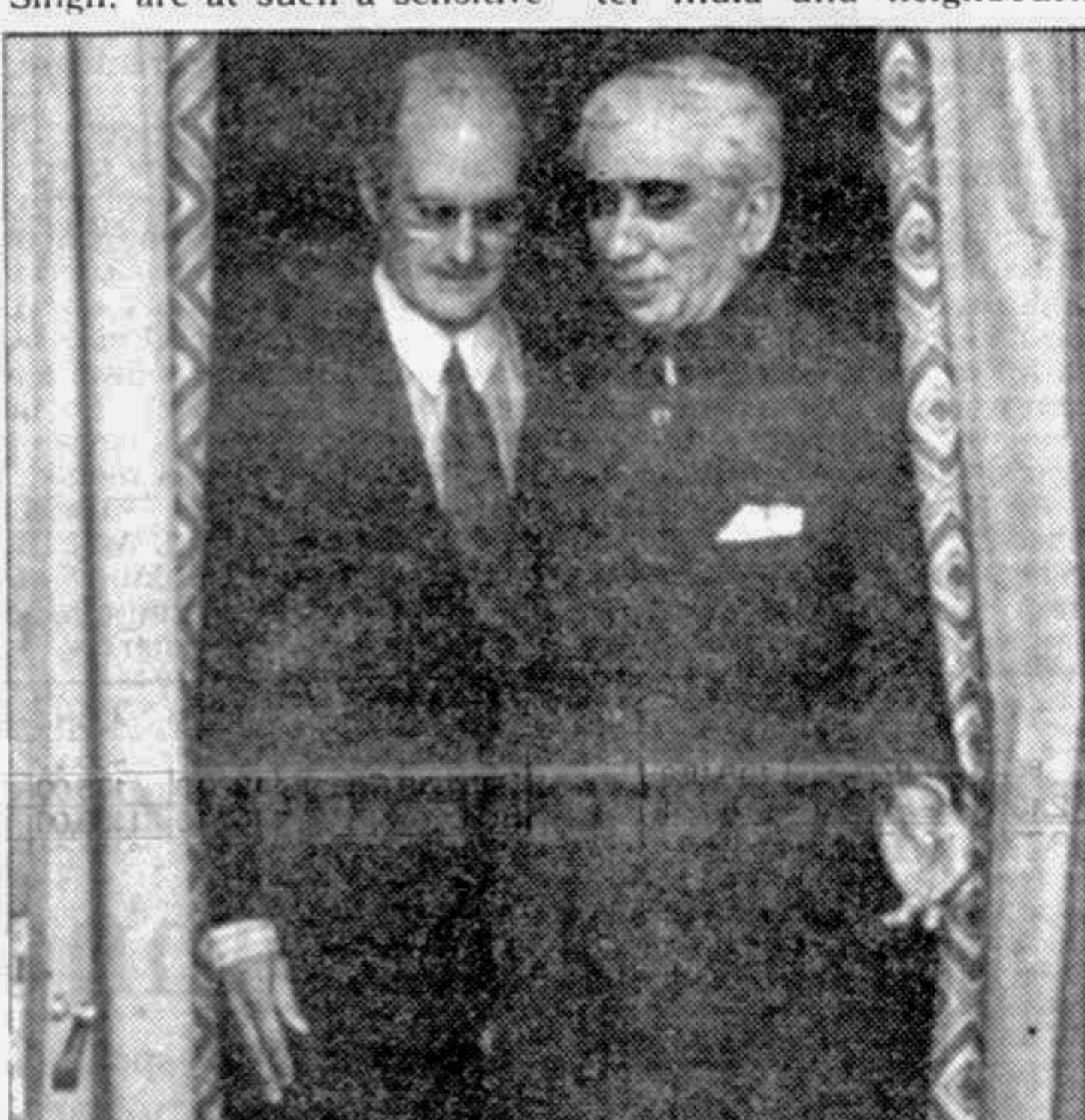
Talbott was expected to spend most of Monday in talks with Singh. He was scheduled to meet later in the day with Vajpayee and Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani. Advani recently took charge of security in Kashmir, subject of a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan that is at the heart of their dangerous rivalry.

The vice chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force Gen Joseph Ralston, accompanied Talbott to New Delhi and was to hold separate talks with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes.

On Tuesday, the Talbott team travels to Pakistan for discussions with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub.

India wants to persuade the United States that it is a responsible nuclear power that should not be the subject of economic sanctions and that should be allowed access to nuclear energy technology it has been denied because of its military programme. India says it needs a nuclear deterrent because of the threat posed by neighbours Pakistan and, particularly, China.

Washington argues the May test set back international progress towards ridding the world of all nuclear weapons. It was called on both India and Pakistan to sign an international test ban treaty.



US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, left, comes out to meet the press along with Jaswant Singh, a top aide of Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, before the start of a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. — AP/UNB photo.

Ex-PM of Chechnya made Dy Armed Forces Chief

MOSCOW, July 20: Chechnya's President Aslan Maskhadov on Sunday appointed former premier and warlord Shamil Basayev as Deputy Armed Forces Chief of the breakaway republic, the Russian News Agency Interfax reported, reports AFP.

Aslanbek Ismaylov, who is close to Basayev, was named as military commander of the Republic, Interfax said. Quoting the president's office, Ismaylov took part in bloody hostage-taking led by Basayev himself during the War of Independence from Russia in June 1995 at Budennovsk in Southern Russia.

Basayev, 33, one of Chechnya's most powerful warlords and a sworn enemy of Russia which has not officially given up seeking his arrest for "terrorism," resigned at the beginning of July from the premier's post that he had been given six months earlier.

Rao says Polls becoming 'annual festivals'

NEW DELHI, July 20: Former Indian prime minister PV Narasimha Rao has warned that democracy in the country is being undermined by frequent elections, a report said today, says AFP.

Rao, prime minister from 1991 to 1996 told The Pioneer newspaper that elections were becoming "annual festivals".

"The people are getting fed up with elections and this poses a threat to democracy in the country," he said adding India was passing through "a serious crisis".

Indian governments are given five-year terms but the country has been wracked by political instability recently, with a five governments in the past two years.

The current government, like its immediate predecessors, is a weak coalition of more than a dozen disparate parties. It does not have a parliamentary majority.

India staged elections in 1996 and 1998 massive logistical operations involving some 660 million voters in the world's largest democracy, both ended in hung parliaments.

Rao is the former leader of the Congress opposition party.

India's ruling coalition faces fresh crisis

MADRAS, India, July 20: India's ruling coalition government woke to a fresh crisis today after a key regional ally set it a two-day ultimatum to act on yet another of its demands or face "disastrous consequences," reports Reuters.

The leader of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) on Sunday demanded that the government implement a Supreme Court ruling on supply of river water to her southern state of Tamil Nadu by Tuesday.

"I'm bound to caution Prime Minister Vajpayee that if the government further delays the notification of the scheme in the official gazette and tabling it in parliament, the consequences will be disastrous," Jayalalitha said in a 10-page statement.

The ultimatum was the latest in a series of demands on the four-month-old government by its cantankerous southern ally.

The AIADMK has been a troublesome partner for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which leads

the minority, rainbow coalition.

The AIADMK kept its allies waiting in march over whether it would offer parliamentary support and earlier this month made a thinly veiled threat to pull out.

The party decided to remain in the government's ranks, but said it would continue to insist that its demands — among them the dismissal from power of a rival party in Tamil Nadu — be met.

Tamil Nadu and its north-western neighbour, Karnataka, have been locked in a dispute for decades over sharing the waters of the southeast flowing Cauvery river.

In August last year the Supreme Court instructed the federal government to implement a "draft scheme" for sharing the river water among various riparian states within two weeks.

Jayalalitha, a former movie actress, said that with no compromise possible with Karnataka on the Cauvery issue it was now a constitutional responsibility of the federal government to act immediately on

the court's earlier orders.

"This is not an issue on which the prime minister can take a unilateral decision. This is an order of the Supreme Court and the central government is obliged under the constitution to carry out the order," she said in her statement.

A senior AIADMK leader said on Monday that the party's deputies would raise the issue in the lower house of parliament later in the day.

"We are going to demand in parliament today that the government notify immediately the setting up of the Cauvery river water authority," Sedapatti Muthiah, leader of the AIADMK parliamentary party, told Reuters by telephone from New Delhi.

The Press Trust of India quoted Parliamentary Affairs Minister Madan Lal Khurana as saying that there was "no threat to the government."

"I am confident that the centre is alive to the situation and will come forward with a solution by July 21," BJP spokesman Venkiah Naidu said.

Myanmar Junta shows few signs of change

BANGKOK, July 20: One year after its admission into the ranks of ASEAN, Myanmar's military has shown few signs of easing its iron grip on the country despite claims by members that inclusion in the regional grouping would help bring about change, analysts say, reports AFP.

There has no indication the Junta is willing to make any concessions after gaining Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) membership, a foreign diplomat in Yangon added, noting repeated opposition calls for dialogue with the government have been ignored.

The opposition won 1990 polls by a landslide but the Junta has refused to relinquish power.

"One thing to remember about ASEAN membership is the Burmese have an incorrect view of what ASEAN membership would bring them," the diplomat said, adding the Junta had expected entry to the group would lead to loans and other aid. Burma was formerly the official name for Myanmar.

"They didn't realise ASEAN is not a lending organisation. If anything, conditions in

Myanmar have deteriorated over the past year as the country was strung by the effects of a regional economic crisis which saw foreign firms pulling projects and at times withdrawing altogether.

Thousands flee as volcano erupts in central Java

JAKARTA, July 20: Thousands of Indonesians fled villages on the slopes of the Merapi volcano in Central Java which erupted spewing ash, lava and deadly heatclouds, reports and officials said today, reports AFP.

Some 6,000 people evacuated their villages on the southwest slopes of Merapi on Sunday, the Kompas daily said here.

However, police in Salam, the main evacuation centre in Magelang district, said few had registered.

"We have so far registered about 120 people but more arrived late last night and they have not yet reported to us," said Suhandoyo from the Salam police.

Famine takes serious turn in Sudan

AJIEP, Sudan, July 20: Children and adults are dying of famine every day at Ajiep in south Sudan's Bahr Al-Ghazal region where the situation is worsening despite the efforts of aid organisations, reports AFP.

For more than a month some 10 children have been dying each week in the nutritional centre run by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF, Doctors Without Borders), which looks after more than 2,300 people.

Emaciated children with distended stomachs sit or lie, mostly naked, under tarpaulins, they are often accompanied by their mothers in the MSF therapeutic centre which takes care of the worst cases. Around them, hundred of women and children lie on the ground, waiting for the next food handout.

The overall mortality rate at Ajiep is 15 dead per 10,000 people per day, whereas a rate of

two per 10,000 is already considered disastrous by aid organisations, MSF said.

"The mortality rate is on the rise, adolescents are starting to die while at the start the victims were especially young children or old people," said Lu Nakel, one of the doctors at the centre in the zone controlled by John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

The SPLA has been fighting government troops for 15 years in a bid to end the domination of the Arabised, Islamic north over the largely Christian and animist south. Ajiep lies just 50 kilometres north of Wau, which is under Sudanese army control.

To ease the pressure on the Nutritional centre, the World Food Programme (WFP) is dropping food a few kilometres away.

"I've come a long way, at home there's nothing left to eat"

said one of more than 2,000 women waiting near the zone where the food is air dropped to be distributed by tribal elders and humanitarian workers with the South Sudanese rebels.

Ajiep, a very isolated place but near enough to Wau where there was bitter fighting recently, draws people from far and wide seeking food at a time when MSF admitted Friday in Brussels that the famine in southern Sudan has reached the scale of the catastrophe in Ethiopia in 1984.

The nights here are colder and the weakened, dehydrated displaced people, lacking shelter, are more prone to disease with cases of pneumonia becoming more and more frequent, according to Dr Nakel.

With the late start of the rainy season, the people are asking for seed to sow for their next harvest. Distributions of seed were carried out several

weeks ago but it failed to grow due to lack of rain. The situation is also dramatic in Wau due to the arrival of many villagers in the government held Garrison town.

Seven hundred children are being looked after in the Sudanese Red Crescent Nutritional Centre where between 50 and 80 more arrive each day, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The Sudanese government and the SPLA have agreed to a three-month ceasefire to facilitate the sending of food to the region which has been devastated by civil war since 1983.

Aid organisations have welcomed the ceasefire as a positive step but warned it would be insufficient to end the famine due to the brevity of the truce and to the presence of armed gangs controlled neither by the government nor by the rebels.

Iraq will not tolerate UN sanctions beyond 8th yr

BAGHDAD, July 20: Iraq warned Sunday that the government and its people would not countenance a continuation of the crippling UN sanctions beyond the upcoming eight-year anniversary, reports AFP.

"The leadership of Iraq and its people are not willing to see the embargo maintained beyond eight years and demand practical measures for it to be lifted," Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said in remarks to mark the 30th anniversary of the revolution that brought the ruling Baath party to power.

Ramadan also accused the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) on disarming Iraq of "interfering in domestic affairs and setting up obstacles to keep the embargo in place."

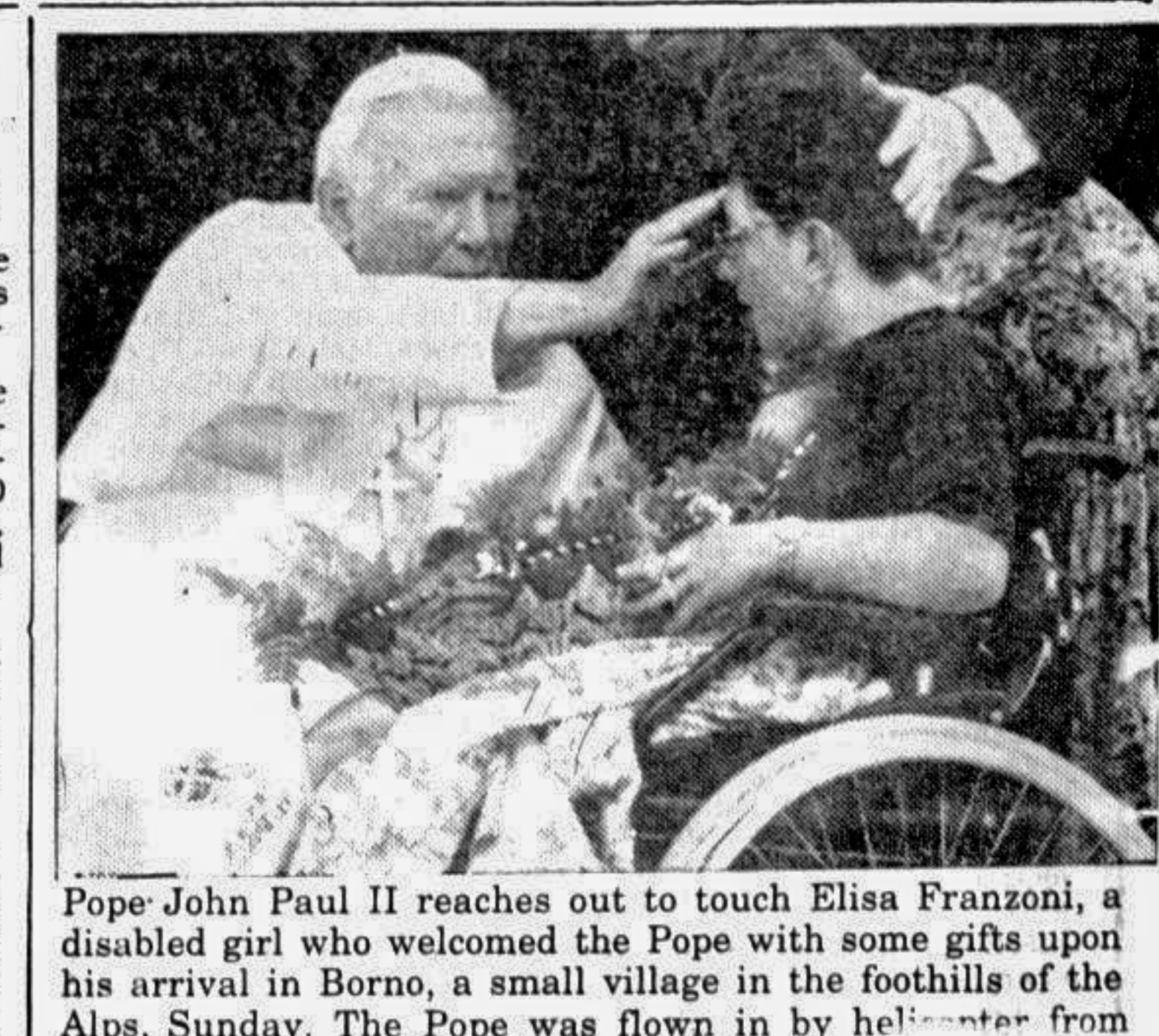
The UN imposed the sanc-

tion after Iraq's August 2, 1990 invasion of neighbouring Kuwait and they cannot be lifted until UN weapons inspectors declare Baghdad free of weapons of mass destruction.

President Saddam Hussein last week said the embargo had started to fall apart but warned Iraq would have to take "appropriate measures" because a lifting of sanctions was still not in sight.

The embargo has really started to crumble in the face of the resistance, firmness and commitment of the Iraqis," he said in a televised address to mark his Baath party anniversary.

Saddam said the Iraq leadership would meet soon to follow up on its May 1 warning to the UN Security Council of "serious consequences" if the sanctions are kept in place.



Pope John Paul II reaches out to touch Elisa Franzoni, a disabled girl who welcomed the Pope with some gifts upon his arrival in Borno, a small village in the foothills of the Alps, Sunday. The Pope was flown in by helicopter from his vacation retreat in Lorenzago. — AP/UNB photo.