

BRIEFLY



Argentine President Carlos Menem (R) and visiting South African President Nelson Mandela exchange documents Thursday in Buenos Aires' Government House. — AP/UNB photo

2 Tamil newsmen held in Lanka: Sir Lankan police are holding two Tamil journalists because of suspected links with Tamil Tiger guerrillas, media minister Mangala Samaraweera said Thursday. AFP reports from Colombo.

The two who work for the Werakesary Tamil daily were arrested within four days of each other and are being questioned, Samaraweera told reporters.

5 women commit suicide in HK: The decomposing bodies of three women and two teenage girls who apparently died in a suicide pact were found in an empty Hong Kong flat, police said yesterday. AP reports from Hong Kong.

Police said in a statement that there were no signs of struggle. However, a pair of black scissors tied to a work with red strings was found hanging from a window, a cult variant of a traditional Chinese symbol to avert evil spirits.

Call to free UNHCR staffer: The UN High Commissioner for Refugees called Thursday for the release of UN staffer Vincent Cochetel, who was kidnapped six months ago in southern Russia. AP reports from the United Nations.

"It is an outrage that Vincent Cochetel is still held hostage," Sadako Ogata said in a release. "I appeal to the kidnappers to release him immediately. Cochetel, 37, who headed UNHCR's regional office in North Ossetia, near Chechnya, was seized by three masked gunmen in his apartment in the capital Vladikavkaz on Jan 29, six months ago next Wednesday.

Novelist Vallejo dies at 75: Manuel Mejia Vallejo, the award-winning Colombian novelist noted for realistic depictions of urban and rural life, died Thursday at age 75, AP says from Bogota.

Mejia Vallejo died at his country estate outside Medellin after suffering two recent strokes, a statement from his family said.

Yemeni return to disputed island: Yemen has returned peacefully to a disputed Red Sea island which was the scene of fierce gun battles between Saudi forces and Yemeni coastguards earlier this week. Saudi officials said early Thursday. AFP reports from Riyadh.

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz confirmed Yemeni forces had returned to the disputed island of Al-Duwaimeh where three Yemeni coastguards were killed and one Yemeni officer captured in clashes Sunday. "All deployments (Saudi or Yemeni) to Al-Duwaimeh took place following an agreement between the two brotherly countries," Prince Nayef told a press conference in Riyadh.

Power transition in Nigeria Main opposition party to contest '99 elections

LAGOS, July 24: Nigeria's largest pro-democracy group agreed Thursday to cooperate with a plan by the country's military ruler to hand over power to a civilian government by May next year, reports AP.

National Democratic Coalition chairman Abraham Adesanya said his group will participate in elections called as part of Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar's democratic transition.

"NADECO is not going to boycott any elections," Adesanya said, dismissing calls by other opposition figures to do so.

Abubakar said Monday he would bring democracy to Nigeria and allow the free formation of opposition political parties. Elections are to be held in the first three months of 1999.

NADECO draws its support from predominantly Christian and ethnic-Yoruba southwestern Nigeria where opposition to military rule is strongest.



Women health support staff get caned as they try to force their way through police barricades towards the Indian Parliament to press their demands for higher wages in New Delhi Thursday. About 3,000 aid workers participated in the rally. — AP/UNB photo

Iran's latest missile test alarms US lawmakers

WASHINGTON, July 24: A month after US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright invited Iran to establish normal relations, Republican lawmakers are expressing alarm over the implications of Iran's test of a missile capable of threatening much of the Middle East, reports AP.

Sen Sam Brownback, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on the Near East and South Asian Affairs, said Wednesday's test creates "a new and incredibly more dangerous environment for the Middle East."

Senate Intelligence Committee chairman Richard Shelby, said if Iran has a missile capable of threatening its neighbors, "what is to stop them from developing the means to deliver such a weapon upon the United States and any of our allies?" He said the test is another powerful argument for the creation of a national missile defense system.

2 soldiers killed in Kashmir blast

JAMMU, July 24: An explosion shook a military transit camp in troubled Kashmir state, killing at least two Indian soldiers and wounding another two, the military said Friday, reports AP.

The blast occurred on Thursday night at the camp where nearly 100 soldiers were waiting to board a train at Bari Brahmana railroad station, 20 kilometres south of Jammu, the winter capital.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. It could have been a hand grenade explosion or a land mine blast or even bursting of ammunition stored in the transit camp, a senior military officer said on condition of anonymity. The military is investigating.

TOEFL tests to be computerised worldwide

NEW YORK, July 24: Hundreds of thousands of foreign students who take the TOEFL test for English proficiency annually will use computers instead of pen and paper starting immediately, the company said Thursday, reports AP.

The TOEFL tests English writing and listening ability and is one of the main examinations used by universities in English-speaking countries to help decide a student's proficiency. The Test of English as a Foreign Language is also used by governments, scholarship programmes and companies.

The computer-based tests will be given more frequently than the 12 times a year the pen-and-paper tests were held, the company said.

The paper-based tests will still be used in some Asian countries for now.

Rwandan army kills top rebel commander

GICYE, Rwanda, July 24: In a blow to an insurgency in Rwanda, the army said it killed the top commander of a rebel group, reports AP.

The bloody body of Lt Col Leonard Nkundiyie was placed on public display in Gicye, 100 km northwest of Kigali, after he was shot to death early Thursday.

Army troops battled Nkundiyie's group in the hills bordering Congo, where rebels easily cross in and out of Rwanda, said Lt Col Musuhyo Kamanzi, the army commander.

Nkundiyie's death is a serious blow to the 2-year rebel insurgency, Kamanzi said.

"He's a big fish," Kamanzi said. "Getting him was a big achievement."

US not giving up on ME peace process: Clinton

WASHINGTON, July 24: President Bill Clinton on Thursday denied the United States was giving up on the Mideast peace process and said he still believed the Israelis and Palestinians could clinch a deal, reports AP.

"We haven't thrown in the towel," Clinton said when asked about reports that US negotiators were giving up in frustration with the deadlocked talks.

"I think it's a lot better to get an agreement and get them into final status talks than it is to give up and let this thing drift dangerously towards conflict," Clinton said.

Israel and the Palestinians resumed their first direct contacts in two months Sunday but were again deadlocked, with the Palestinians insisting the talks achieved nothing and announcing an end to contacts with Israel.

White House spokesman Michael McCurry said earlier Thursday that Washington did not want to "embrace failure," and that it was up to the Israelis and Palestinians to revive their

deadlocked talks. But Clinton insisted that if he "thought this process were over I'd say it was over," and added: "There is still a chance we can get an agreement."

US officials have, nonetheless, begun to despair over the 16-month-old stalemate and Wednesday the White House sidestepped a call to send its envoy Dennis Ross to spur stalled Mideast talks.

A senior Palestinian official accused Washington of breaking its promise to pressure Israel to accept a US plan to get the Middle East peace process back on track.

"They really reneged on their promises," Palestinian Planning Minister Nabil Shaath said in an interview with the Washington Post published Thursday.

"They neither declared publicly what their proposals were, nor have they brought Israeli approval comparable to the approval we have given," senior advisor to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat told the paper.

AP adds from Rabat: Senior

Arab officials plan to meet in Morocco July 29-30 to discuss Israel's development plans in Jerusalem, the Moroccan foreign minister said Thursday.

King Hassan II will preside over the meeting of the Al Qods Committee of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. Al Qods is the Arabic name for Jerusalem, which both the Palestinians and Israelis claim as their capital.

Moroccan Foreign Minister Abdellatif Fillali said Israel's decision June 21 to extend Jerusalem's boundaries to include several towns and expand some municipal services from Jerusalem to West Bank settlements had created a "dangerous situation."

King Hassan, who has played a role as a mediator in the Middle East, is head of the Al Qods committee.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will attend the meeting which is to take place in Casablanca along with the foreign ministers of the member nations of the organisation of the Islamic Conference.

'Pakistan to sign CTBT if India's N-programme is contained'

ISLAMABAD, July 24: Despite official statements suggesting a change of stance, Pakistan has not delinked its nuclear policy from that of India and will sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) only if New Delhi's nuclear programme is "contained", highly placed sources here said. This has been conveyed to Washington during the just concluded talks here with the American delegation led by US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, who had visited New Delhi before coming to Islamabad.

"Pakistan has made it clear to the United States that it would not sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty unless India's ambitious nuclear programme is contained," the sources told IANS.

Islamabad will sign the treaty only after New Delhi does so, the sources said. "We simply cannot risk our security," they explained when reminded of recent statements by top government officials that Pakistan has "delinked" its nuclear policy from that of India. Asked if Pakistan would be able to stand up to American pressure to sign the CTBT at a time when this nation's economy is in bad shape, the sources replied, "Our biggest problem is security and in no way we are going to com-

promise on it." Pakistan has told the US that "there has to be an effective engagement by the major world powers in the whole process of peace and security in South Asia, which has to focus on Kashmir."

Quoting Foreign Secretary Shamsah Ahmed, the sources said peace and security in this part of the world would remain elusive unless the Kashmir dispute is addressed meaningfully. The sources claimed that Washington shared Islamabad's concern over Kashmir. US President Bill Clinton, in his letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which was handed over by Talbott, said that India and Pakistan should resume talks and Washington would use its influence to engage the two countries on Kashmir. The US delegation left Islamabad after three days of talks, which mainly focused on the situation in South Asia after the May nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. The talks were to have ended on July 22, but were extended by a day. They would resume next month in Washington.

Malaysia signs CTBT

AP adds: Malaysia has joined a growing list of countries to sign a global nuclear

test ban treaty, the Foreign Ministry said Friday.

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was signed by Malaysia's permanent representative to the United Nations, Hasmy Agam, in New York Thursday, the Foreign Ministry statement said.

Malaysia will soon take the necessary steps to ratify the treaty, it said.

"The signing of the CTBT is in consonance with Malaysia's firm commitment to the goals of general and complete disarmament," it said. "It is also a reaffirmation of Malaysia's consistent support towards all international efforts aimed at nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons."

The CTBT, hammered out at a 1996 international conference in Geneva, has been signed by 150 countries. Fifteen countries have ratified the treaty, which will be enforced only after all 44 countries which have nuclear facilities have ratified it.

The treaty bans all nuclear test explosions and provides for a verification regime that consists of an international monitoring system, a consultation mechanism, on-site inspections and confidence-building measures.



Unidentified elderly Serb women in the Red Cross office in Pristina Thursday. Thirty-five Serbs were handed over by ethnic Albanian militants of KLA-Kosovo Liberation Army to Red Cross officials late Wednesday. The Serbs were captured by KLA in the villages near the town of Orahovac, some 50 km southwest of Pristina, six days ago. — AP/UNB photo

Cambodian polls campaign enters final day of hope and tension

PHNOM PENH, July 24: The violence-strewn campaign for Cambodia's second election in the post-Khmer Rouge era entered a final day of hope and tension Friday, as monks led thousands of people in a march for peace and a main opposition candidate set up a challenge to strongman Hun Sen, reports AP.

Buddhist monks and nuns concluded a week-long march from the countryside and entered the capital, their numbers swelling from 150 to 3,000 as lay people joined near the Angkor-style Independence Monument. Banners read: "The more we fight, the more we lose," and "We want a non-violent election."

Hun Sen has been widely accused of using violence and fear to ensure he wins Sunday's vote. It comes a year after he deposed his co-premier, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, in fighting in the capital with tanks, mortars and rockets. The campaign officially ends Friday, followed by a cooling-off day.

Sam Rainsy, a former finance minister and dissident with wide support in Phnom Penh, planned to close his campaign by highlighting what he calls a choice between communist-era dictatorship and democracy. Sam Rainsy was to lead sup-

porters in a convoy of trucks for a rally at a park near the National Assembly, where on March 30 1997, grenades were hurled into a protest he was leading. Sixteen people died. Sam Rainsy was among more than 100 injured.

The attack has widely been blamed on Hun Sen but, like the killings of some 100 Ranariddh supporters after last year's coup and more than 20 pre-election murders believed to be political, no one has ever been arrested or prosecuted.

Afterward, Sam Rainsy plans to take the trucks into Takhman, the town outside Phnom Penh where Hun Sen lives. Roads to Hun Sen's house—known as the "Tiger's lair"—were likely to be blocked by security forces. Hun Sen has been recovering at home from an appendectomy.

The Cambodian capital has been calm, but an under-current of tension remains. Many fear that if Hun Sen loses the vote he would call out the army to retain power.

Opposition leaders acknowledged the campaign has been relatively peaceful compared to 1993 when the Khmer Rouge guerrillas remained a deadly force and launched attacks against towns and ethnic Vietnamese villages. The United Nations deployed

20,000 peacekeepers and spent \$1.3 billion organising that election, meant to bring peace and democracy after decades of civil war and the Khmer Rouge regime of the late 1970s that caused the deaths of as many as 2 million people.

The result was imperfect. Ranariddh's royalist FUNCINPEC party won. But Hun Sen, who came to power in 1985 under the harsh Vietnamese occupation that followed the Khmer Rouge regime, forced his way into a coalition by threatening civil war.

This time, Cambodia is organising the election and the UN role is limited largely to coordinating some 678 foreign observers. Hun Sen-linked organisations have tried to dominate the observation missions. His government needs the vote to restore international legitimacy and aid lost after the coup.

Overall, some 5.4 million people are registered to vote for 122 National Assembly seats.

Another report adds: Amnesty International denounced the human rights climate in Cambodia as campaigning for parliamentary elections drew to a close Friday and urged the international community to wake up to intimidation and violence

against the opposition.

Demelza Stobblings of the London-based human rights group said that political killings and threats have soared since Cambodian strongman Hun Sen ousted Prince Norodom Ranariddh as his co-premier in a coup a year ago, but that on an international level "many people are not prepared to say what is happening here."

Killings and attacks on members of the opposition have continued during the one-month election campaign, she said, and human rights workers are inundated with reports of threats or other forms of intimidation against those who oppose Hun Sen or his ruling party.

Activists have been intimidated, politicians have been threatened, party agents have been shot and killed, and prisoners have been illegally arrested and badly beaten by policemen while held in detention," Amnesty said in a statement.

"Much of the international community plays down the level of violence, sanitises the trauma of victims and ignores the impact of human rights violence on freedom of association and expression," the statement said.

Resumption of cross-strait talks Top Chinese negotiator due in Taiwan

TAIPEI, July 24: A top Chinese negotiator is to visit Taiwan today, two days after Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui called for resumption of cross-strait talks, reports AP.

Li Yafei, Deputy Secretary-General of China's quasi-official negotiation body association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), will arrive this afternoon for an eight-day visit, leading a 18-member delegation of school headmasters.

Coming along with the group will be four ARATS officials and two reporters, Jan Jyh-Hong, Deputy Secretary-General of ARATS's Taiwan counterpart Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), told reporters on the eve of the landmark trip.

Jan himself flew to Beijing in April, ending a three-year break in contacts sparked by Lee's historic trip to the United States in mid-1995.

Beijing, alleging the US trip was aimed to split the island from the "motherland," broke off approach talks and further sent the bilateral ties into deep freeze by holding six

rounds of war games and missile tests in 1995-96.

On Saturday, Li is to attend an education seminar in Taipei and call on private pro-unification organisation before visiting SEF Chairman Koo Chen-Fu on Sunday.

The SEF is expected to raise the topic of the China trip by Koo sometime between late September and early October when he meets with Li.

At the end of a meeting by a top Taiwanese advisory body on unification with China Wednesday, Lee hinged a high hope on Koo's visit.

"It is my earnest hope that the two sides will take advantage of this opportunity to engage in a frank exchange of views in order to resume institutionalised consultations and formulate a feasible blueprint for the improvement of bilateral relations and the democratic renunciation of China," Lee said.

Li will also tour scenic spots in central and southern Taiwan before departing from Kaohsiung on July 31.

Off the Record

Watermelons everyday keeps heat at bay

BEIJING: Residents of the Southern Chinese city of Guangzhou have been devouring 1,000 tonnes of watermelons a day during a recent heatwave, official media reported yesterday, reports AP.

The fruit is a favourite among Chinese during the country's long hot summers, where temperatures can stay above 35 degrees centigrade for weeks on end.

The China Daily said ten days of hot weather had turned Guangzhou, with its population of around six million, into an "unbearable furnace," despite its proximity to the south China.

Sales of air-conditioners and swimsuits at a local departmental store had rocketed in recent days, as residents tried anything to get out of the heat.

People were jamming themselves into swimming pools—like sardines," the paper said.

Insect-wiping wasps

BEIJING: Officials in the northern port city of Tianjin have got the go-ahead to release a gigantic swarm of five million wasps, in a bid to wipe out plant insects, the China Daily reported yesterday, reports AP.

The wasps would be released in the hope they would gobble up at least 60 per cent of the city's leaf-eating insects, there by protecting plant life.

The parasitic wasp, cultivated by the city's Gardening Research Institute, were a small breed which feeds on the pupae of leaf-eating insects, the paper said.

Yugoslavia to widen military zone near Albanian border

BELGRADE, July 24: Yugoslavia has decided to widen its military zone near the border with Albania to check growing infiltration attempts by ethnic Albanian separatists, the Yugoslav agency Tanjug said Thursday, reports AP.

Quoting federal premier Momir Bulatovic, the agency said the measure came from a need to combat Kosovo Albanian "terrorists" trying to bring arms and people into the southern Serbian province from Albania.

The border zone with Albania has varied between 500 metres and to kilometres wide because of the rough mountainous terrain, but will be widened to around 5km.

Speaking on Belgrade TV station Studio B, Bulatovic added that the measure would require an additional commitment from the Yugoslav army, but he did not specify when the decision would be implemented.

5000-yr-old temple discovered in Iraq

AL-NAMEL, Iraq, July 24: Iraqi archaeologists have discovered a circular 5,000-year-old temple that appears to have been used by Mesopotamians of a little-known culture, the head of the excavation team said Thursday, reports AP.

Burhan Shakir, an archaeologist with Iraq's Antiquities Department, said the building, which is 600 square metres, was discovered in March.

"We are certain this was a temple, but we still do not know what gods were worshipped here and what kind of cult was practiced," Shakir said.

The temple stands on a promontory overlooking the Tigris River, 320 km north of Baghdad. It consists of five circular aisles separated by mud-brick walls 2 metres thick. The corridors rise about 6 metres above the surrounding plain and then merge into a spiral staircase which leads to a second floor.

That floor has been bulldozed by modern farmers building houses. About 90 per cent of the archaeological site is occupied by the village of Al-Namel. "The whole building was vaulted, but unfortunately was left us no roofs," said Hazem Al-Najafi, a member of the team and an expert on Mesopotamian architecture.

The entrance, one-metre wide, is still vaulted and leads to alleys containing scores of niches in which the inhabitants placed their idols.

Apart from the entrance, there are no openings or windows in the building. The walls have scorch marks about every two metres.

Al-Najafi said these came from torches used to light the corridors. The excavators have found no artifacts—no statues, pottery or clay tablets—in the temple.

A nearby cemetery yielded 50 graves and artifacts including cooking bowls, cups, pots, goblets, jugs, storage jars and containers made of fine pottery glazed with coloured geometrical designs.

For the first time in more than 100 years of Mesopotamian excavation, we find traces of two distinctive and culturally remote civilisations appearing together in a grave," Shakir added.

The ancient inhabitants buried their dead with plain ceramic items of the Sumerian civilisation of southern Iraq as well as with elegant vases decorated with flowers and animals that hail from a little-known culture in northern Iraq.