

BRIEFLY



Two young boys embrace each other after Eid prayers on the first day of Eid-ul-Fitr at the Jama Masjid in Srinagar Tuesday. —UNB/AP photo

Blast kills 1 in Vietnam

One fisherman was killed and two others were seriously injured in a dynamite-fishing accident near Ly Son island off Vietnam's central coast, a local police officer said yesterday. AP reports from Hanoi.

Duong Len, 33, died en route to the island clinic. His two colleagues are being treated at the clinic for injuries suffered when the grenade they were using exploded before the could throw it overboard from their small boat, officer said. He said dynamite fishing is very popular around the island because poor fishermen cannot afford to buy trawlers for off-shore fishing.

Former Argentine ruler held: Argentina's last military ruler in the country's 1976-1983 dictatorship was arrested Wednesday for allegedly conspiring to steal babies from political prisoners, officials said. AFP reports from Buenos Aires.

Retired General Reynaldo Bignone, 71, is the seventh general and Juntas member, and the ninth military officer arrested by investigating Judge Adolfo Bagnasco in his two-year investigation of the missing children.

21 killed in tornado in SA: At least 21 people were killed when a tornado hit the rural areas around the small town of Mount Ayliff in South Africa's Eastern Cape province, police told AFP on Tuesday in Mount Ayliff.

He said about 225 people had been admitted to the Mount Ayliff Hospital after the tornado hit on Monday afternoon. Other injured people had been transferred to hospitals in the neighbouring KwaZulu Natal province. The Sapa news agency reported that the injured included about 100 children who were critically hurt.

25 feared dead in avalanches in India: At least 25 people were feared dead following heavy snow and avalanches in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, AFP reports from New Delhi.

The Times of India newspaper said the dead included 15 labourers doing road-mending work in the state's mountainous northern reaches.

20 killed in Burundi clashes: Twenty people have been killed in two armed clashes, in southeastern Burundi and near the capital Bujumbura, official radio said in a broadcast monitored in Nairobi on Tuesday. AFP reports from Nairobi.

In an attack blamed on Hutu rebels in the southeastern province of Makamba, 17 people were killed, the radio said, without elaborating. In Kanyosha, just a few kilometres from Bujumbura, three rebels died in clashes with soldiers of the Tutsi-dominated army.

Quayle to run for US presidency: After sitting out the 1996 presidential campaign, former Vice President Dan Quayle is taking the first step toward seeking the top spot on the Republican ticket in 2000, AP says from Washington.

"I've thought about this for a long time. I've wanted to be president for a long time, and the year 2000 is looking like my opportunity," Quayle said Thursday night on CNN's "Larry King Live." He intends to file a formal statement of candidacy next week, the first step in his bid for the presidency.

21 die in bus accidents in Philippines: Twenty-one people were killed and 32 injured after a bus plunged into a ravine in the northern Philippines police said Thursday. AFP reports from Manila.

The BSU was travelling on Wednesday from the town of San Fernando to the northern mountain city of Baguio when its brakes failed at the town of Sablan and it fell into a 12 metre ravine, said chief inspector Edgar Pajatan.

ROK changes spy agency's name: South Korea's spy agency became known as the National Intelligence Service from yesterday, a name change meant to enhance its tarnished image and reflect its new mandate. AP says from Seoul.

Bid to kill Sharif
Two Muslim
militants held

LAHORE, Pakistan, Jan 22: Two Muslim militants have been arrested and confessed to engineering an attempt to kill Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, official sources said Friday, reports AFP.

The suspects, both Pakistanis, have admitted they planted a powerful bomb that blew up a bridge on the road to Sharif's farmhouse at Raiwind on January 3, the sources said.

Three people were killed when the bomb went off shortly before Sharif was due to cross the bridge in a motorcade on way to the family estate, 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Lahore, capital of central Punjab province.

The suspects belong to Lashkar-i Jhangvi, an underground extremist group from the country's majority Sunni Muslim community, they said, the group is blamed for a spate of sectarian killings in the country.

Ravi Shankar
wins int'l prize
for media music

BONN, Jan 22: Sitar Maestro pandit Ravi Shankar has been nominated for the International Prize for Film and Media Music for 1999 in recognition of his special achievements in increasing the significance of music the audio-visual media, reports PTI.

Ravi Shankar would receive the award personally on June 12 at a special function here, Dr Bernd Busch, director of the German government's prestigious Forum of Art and Exhibition told reporters here today.

The 79-year-old Indian virtuoso is the third recipient of the award instituted by the forum in 1995 in connection with the centenary celebrations of the birth of film.

The prize is the only one of its kind which exclusively pays homage to special achievement in the sphere of music in the audio-visual media.

Plan to bomb US Embassy

Pakistan denies
Indian media
allegations

ISLAMABAD, Jan 22: Pakistan on Thursday denied charges of complicity in a plot to blow up the US Embassy and two consular offices in India, saying that the allegations are the "most sinister fabrications designed solely to malign" the country, reports AP.

Indian newspapers said Wednesday that police arrested four people, including a suspected Pakistani spy, who allegedly planned the bombing plot.

The accused have been linked to Osama Bin Laden — a Saudi jihadist.

In a statement, Pakistan's Foreign Office charged that the news reports "aimed at undermining our relations with the United States."

The Indian government never officially raised such allegations with Pakistan, he said.

The ringleader of the bombing plot was identified as Sayed Abu Nasir, 27, said to be a Bangladeshi working for Pakistan's spy agency, an Indian police official was quoted by the Indian Express as saying.

6-month-old puppy
survives open
heart surgery

CAPE TOWN, Jan 22: Milo, the six-month-old puppy, was on Thursday recovering from a six-hour long heart operation by surgeons who normally operate on human beings, reports AP.

The brown and white Jack Russell terrier had defects in all four chambers of his heart, an unusual and potentially lethal condition called "Tetralogy of Fallot" that is more common only found in human children.

"We've generally adapted the operation to the anatomy of the dog, which is slightly different from humans," said Dr Johan Brink of the University of Cape Town Medical School.

The success or failure of the procedure would be known over the next 24 to 48 hours, Brink said. The operation took place in an animal laboratory using a heart-lung machine and other specialised equipment.

The owner of the dog, Cheeky Lombard, cried when she got the news the puppy had survived the operation, APTN reported.

Curfew imposed in eastern islands
Deadly ethnic riots claim
24 lives in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Jan 22: Security forces patrolled three remote eastern Indonesian islands and imposed a curfew Friday after days of deadly rioting by rival mobs of Christians and Muslims, reports AP.

Police feared the death toll, now at 24, could climb on the troubled islands of Ambon, Sanana and Seram in the Maluku group, known in Dutch colonial times as the Spice Islands.

About 3,000 people fled their homes for the safety of army bases and police stations.

A group of 40 foreigners, mainly American and British Christian missionaries, were evacuated by charter plane from Ambon to Darwin in neighbouring Australia Thursday night.

"There's rioting, burning, looting. Some people died," Australian Broadcasting Corp. television quoted one of the evacuees as saying.

"We decided it was best to get out of there while we still could," said another.

The worst carnage occurred on Ambon, 2,300 kilometres northeast of Jakarta, where 22 people have been killed since Tuesday.

At least 10 mosques and churches were set afire along with dozens of homes and other buildings.

About 2,500 police and troop reinforcements have been flown into restore order after three days of mayhem.

Police fired warning shots to disperse rampaging mobs at the height of the fighting. Some rioters claim their friends were shot to death.

Police said there were no outbreaks of fighting on Thursday morning. However, residents contacted by telephone said gangs of men armed with machetes and sticks roamed Ambon's streets.

The violence was the latest in series of clashes to hit Indonesia as it grapples with its worst economic crisis in three decades. Soaring inflation, unemployment and poverty rates have all increased social tensions.

About 90 per cent of Indonesia's 202 million people are Muslim, making it the world's most populous Islamic country. The riots hit areas with large Christian populations.

Police said 134 people were injured in Ambon, 102 of them seriously. Many were stabbed, beaten or trapped in burning buildings. Some were attacked with rocks, machetes, clubs and even bows and arrows.

Ambon's airport remained closed to commercial flights on Thursday.

The riots began during Eid-

ul-Fitr, which comes at the end of the holy month of Ramadan and is supposed to be a time of peace and reconciliation.

The violence on Ambon began when Muslims attacked a Christian man, whom they accused of being drunk and of insulting their Islamic beliefs. The rioting soon spread.

Two people were burned to death Wednesday night during a riot on Sanana Island, 300 kilometres northwest of Ambon. Two churches were also burned during a riot in Pina village on Seram Island, just north of Ambon.

Outbreaks of rioting and looting have escalated in Indonesia since student protests and unrest forced ex-President Suharto to quit last May.

During his authoritarian 32-year rule, Suharto used the military to crack down on lawlessness and dissent. But since he quit, the armed forces have found it increasingly difficult to control disorder while fending off allegations of past human rights abuses.

Meanwhile, 3,000 people have fled their villages after four men were killed this week in a series of clashes between two civil ethnic groups near Pontianak on Borneo, about 900 kilometres north of Jakarta, police said.



Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi, second from right, meets with party leaders to implement the 33% reservation of seats in the party to women Wednesday. Behind the group are pictures of Congress Party leaders, including Sonia's late husband, slain prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, far right. —UNB/AP photo

NATO amasses wide array of
firepower around Y'slavia

BRUSSELS, Jan 22: NATO commands a wide array of firepower stationed near Yugoslavia in the event of a military showdown over Kosovo, informed sources said Thursday, reports AP.

More than 200 fighter planes, including F-15, F-16 and stealth aircraft have been amassed mostly in northern Italy.

Belgrade has 80 fighters, plus sophisticated anti-aircraft system developed in the days of the former communist Yugoslavia to deal with a feared Soviet attack.

US firepower is the backbone of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces in the Mediterranean region. The aircraft carrier USS Enterprise and eight warships have been redeployed to the Adriatic and are scheduled to arrive in the Adriatic Sea in the coming days.

Fighter pilots based in northern Italy have been moved up from a 96-hour to a 40-hour alert, hastening the redeployment of the aircraft NATO members provided before the Kosovo crisis eased last October by a US-brokered ceasefire.

At the height of tensions between Serbian forces and rebel Kosovo Albanians, NATO had 430 aircraft close to the Balkans — some already there on Bosnian peacekeeping duty.

Most aircraft were redeployed when Belgrade agreed to NATO demands to reduce Serbian forces in Kosovo.

Among NATO firepower already in the region, some air-

craft have been outfitted with long-range cruise missiles.

Others possess air-to-ground and air-to-air defence missiles. US warships and submarines are also equipped with cruise missiles.

The other NATO forces in the region are: Eight German Tornado-ECR fighters arrived in Piacenza, Italy, on Thursday.

Gay marriages
'incongruous',
says Pope

VATICAN CITY, Jan 22: Pope John Paul II on Thursday deplored efforts to give gay unions the same recognition as marriages between men and women, reports AP.

John Paul lamented what he called a "widespread deterioration of the natural and religious sense of marriage," which he said has "worsened repercussions both in the personal and the public sphere."

"It's not possible to ignore the growing phenomenon of simple de facto unions and the inconsistent opinion campaigns to obtain conjugal dignity for unions even among people from the same sex," John Paul said.

The gay rights organisation Archigay swiftly reacted.

"This might be the first time in two centuries that a pontiff has attacked the role of love, affirming a preference for a relationship coldly based on rational values," the president of Archigay said in a statement.

specialising in search-and-destroy missions of anti-aircraft batteries.

— France said it had sent eight Mirage 2000C fighters, four Mirage 2000D fighters, five Jaguar reconnaissance aircrafts and a C-160 transall Gabriel aircraft, all of which are coordinated with the aircraft carrier Foch, stationed in the Adriatic with an arsenal of 18 fighters, including 14 Super Etendard equipped with laser-guided bombs, and four Etendard reconnaissance aircraft.

— The Netherlands has sent eight F-16s and has a frigate sailing in the Mediterranean.

— Britain has four fighter-bombers and a refueling aircraft.

— Belgium has deployed six F-16 fighters at the airbase in Amendola.

— Denmark has sent to Italy six F-16 aircraft and 100 soldiers.

— Norway has deploy six F-16s and 230 and 230 soldiers.

— Portugal has sent three F-16 and two Hercules C-130 aircraft to the US air base in Aviano, Italy, with a third C-130 scheduled to arrive on Friday.

The rump Yugoslavia's forces include 79 Mig fighters — 47 MIG-21F, 17 MIG-21U and 15 MIG-29 — according to the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) in London.

Serbian forces command ground-to-air missile batteries deployed in eight different sites, equipped with about 100 Sam missile with a range of up to 16 kilometres, the institute said.

1989 bombing of French airliner
Six Libyans to be tried
in absentia in France

PARIS, Jan 22: Six alleged Libyan secret agents accused in the 1989 bombing of a French airliner in which 170 people died will be tried in absentia on March 8, judicial officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

The six, accused of murder or complicity in murder "in connection with a terrorist enterprise," will be tried by a special court of seven magistrates, headed by Judge Yves Jacob, the sources said.

The trial is expected to last three days.

The airliner, a DC-10 operated by the company UTA, was on a flight between Brazzaville, Congo, and Paris on September 26, 1989 when it blew up over Niger, killing all 170 passengers and the crew. The debris was found scattered across a huge swathe of the Sahara desert.

Under French law, lawyers cannot argue in court on behalf of persons tried in absentia. In addition, courts only have the right to acquit or apply maximum penalties to an absent defendant. And if that person is eventually arrested, he or she has to stand trial again.

The six include Abdallah Senoussi, Libyan leader Colonel Moammar Gaddafi's brother-in-law, whom French counter-espionage consider to be the former number two in

Libyan intelligence and the man behind the attack.

The others are Abdallah Elazragh, who was a diplomat in Brazzaville in 1989, Ibrahim Naeili, Musab Arabas, Abdallah Hammouda, considered Senoussi's right-hand man, and Abdelsalam Shiban.

Four international arrest warrants were issued by France in 1991, when examining magistrate Jean-Louis Brogiere officially pointed the finger at Libya.

He focused his inquiry on networks of Islamic extremists close to Iran, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Syria, Shiite terrorist groups and Bernard Yanga, a pro-Libyan Congolese dissident.

The Libyan government, in 1996, said it had seized explosives identical to those used in the bombing, purportedly from anti-Gaddafi activists.

The United Nations passed two resolutions in 1992, condemning the UTA bombing as well as the attack on a Pan Am jumbo jet over Lockerbie, Scotland on December 21, 1988 that killed 270 people.

The United States and Britain have identified two Libyans, Abdel Basset Ali Fhimah and Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah, whom they want to stand trial for the attack.

Off the Record

Chocomania

RIYADH: Saudi people ate their way through 250 tonnes of chocolate during this week's three-day Eid-ul-fitr holidays, a Riyadh-based newspaper said, reports AFP.

The kingdom's 18 million residents bought between 13.3 million and 14.6 million dollars worth of chocolate during the festival, which marked the end of the most sacred month of Ramadan.

Shopkeepers said sales had risen some 20 per cent compared to the previous year, which they put down to the colder weather.

'Nail soup' a la carte?

TOKYO: School lunches are being checked with metal detectors after nails were found in meals served to students in Japanese city of Nagano, a city official said, reports Reuters.

"Nails were discovered in soups in six schools last December, sometimes by students when they bit down on them," said Masao Mizuno, an official with Nagano's board of education.

Nobody was injured in the incidents, which included nails up to three cm long, he said.

"When we couldn't find where the nails came from, we decided after considering several possibilities that using metal detectors was the best option," he said.

"It is customary in Japanese primary and middle schools for school lunches to be prepared at a central kitchen and distributed to the schools, where they are served in classrooms by the students themselves."

Mizuno said the use of small, hand-held metal detectors began at the three central kitchens that prepare the food for Nagano city schools on Wednesday, following extensive investigations that included questioning of kitchen employees.

King Hussein likely to
designate eldest son
as crown prince

AMMAN, Jan 22: King Hussein of Jordan's eldest son Abdullah replaced Crown Prince Hassan Ibn Talal in a meeting on Wednesday with Gulf Royals, officials said, in a sign that he will soon be designated new crown prince, reports AFP.

Princess Abdallah, 36, welcomed the crown prince of Bahrain and the Emir of Dubai along with other Gulf Royals and officials as they arrived in Jordan to meet King Hussein who returned home Tuesday after six months of cancer treatment in the United States.

According to Jordanian protocol, Crown Prince Hassan Ibn Talal usually welcomes visiting crown princes, but Hassan was not even present at King Hussein's meeting with the royals.

"It has become clear that King Hussein will designate Prince Abdallah crown prince," a political official told AFP.

The official added that there would be no need to amend the constitution as it already allows the King to designate his eldest son as the crown prince.

King Hussein initially made Prince Abdallah crown prince in 1963 but in 1965 he designated his brother Prince Hassan Ibn Talal crown prince after amending the constitution to allow brothers as well as sons of the king to be heir to the throne.

The king, who had survived a series of assassination attempts, wanted to avoid a long regency for the young Abdallah

in the event of his death.

Prince Abdallah, born January 30, 1962, is King Hussein's eldest child from his second marriage to Toni Gardiner, a Briton who was renamed Princess Mona when they married.

He trained at Britain's Sandhurst military academy from 1980 and studied for one year at Oxford University, graduating in 1984 with a diploma in international politics.

Abdallah has been a brigadier in the Jordanian Army since 1994 and has commanded the elite Special Operations Command since 1997. He is married to Princess Rania, a Jordanian of Palestinian origin, and has two children.

Prince Hussein (born 1994) and Princess Iman (born 1996).

4 Tamil Tigers
shot dead in
Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Jan 22: Sri Lankan troops gunned down four Tamil tiger rebels and wounded two more during a clash in eastern Sri Lanka, the Defence Ministry said Friday, reports AP.

Ministry's spokesman Major Kumar Dewage said Thursday that four fatalities occurred near Trincomalee, 230 kilometres east of Colombo when troops fired at group of rebels.

Seven soldiers were gunned down in Tiarat after their vehicle was blown up by a landmine according to the newspapers.

The two attacks took place on Sunday the last day of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, bringing the total number killed during this Ramadan to more than 170.

Asians take to meat as vegetarianism sprouts in the west

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Jan 22: Vegetarianism is on the move in the West, but in Asia, where a green diet was first extolled, people fear more steaks and burgers will be sizzling on dining room tables, reports AP.

Affluence and Asian youths aping Western ways, they contend, are serving to replace such traditional and health staples as bean curd, lentils and rice with processed meats and fatty fast food.

Even in veggie superpower India, where plants and dairy products make up some 80 per cent of food eaten, millions are "sitting on the dietary fence," according to Jashu Shah, general secretary of The Vegetarian Society in Bombay.

"Young Indians are taking their cue from Western media — not real Western people. So they've come to think that to smoke, drink and eat non-veg is modern and fashionable," said Shah during the recent congress

of the International Vegetarian Union.

While Indian gurus once went West to convert carnivores, Shah and others say Western vegetarians should now come East to set examples.

"Vegetarianism is spreading in the West and the next century will see a massive growth," says the union's deputy president, Maxwell G. Lee. "It would be a great tragedy if it stopped or birthplace, Asia."

Lee said that in Britain, about 4 million people were vegetarians and another 17 million had cut back on red meat, a number of these because of the mad cow disease scare.

With France a notable exception, more Western Europeans were shunning meat, especially in Holland, Germany, Italy and Spain.

Vegetarian groups are even sprouting in Eastern Europe, where not long ago it was hard

to order a decent salad, and in some African countries.

As just about everywhere else, North Americans are turning to a plant-based diet largely for personal health concerns.

Almost daily they're reminded of how fruits and vegetables can help fight cancer while eating meat heightens chances of heart disease.

But Canadian Kevin Pickard, a union board member, said recent surveys showed people, ethical arguments about killing animals came a close second with environmental concerns a more distant third as reasons for switching.

Forming an Asian Vegetarian Union during the congress, the continent's vegetarians plan to push all three arguments and start societies in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and South Korea where none exist.

In China, where bean curd

was first produced some 2,000 years ago, McDonald's outlets now outnumber vegetarian restaurants in Beijing.

In Japan, meat was virtually untouched before the country opened up to the West in the mid-19th century. Now, meat steadily cuts into the centuries-old diet of vegetables, rice and fish, says the Japanese Vegetarian Society.

Health and ethics aside, the union posts an apocalyptic scenario should China and India — with a combined population of 2 billion and growing — turn to general meat-eating.

"If China and India decide to eat veal and quails' eggs, how long will this earth last?" asked Vanessa Clark, a board member of the 110-year-old union.

Appetite for meat, the union says, translates to clearing of forests for grazing pastures and depletion of water. It argues that a plot of land can feed 10

times the number of people on a vegetarian diet compared with a meat-based one.

Observing trends in the West, Lee hopes that by the mid-21st century "there won't be any need for a vegetarian society because we will have conquered the world, peacefully."

It won't be easy. There are still probably no more than 15 million vegetarians in North America.

World meat production is still growing. According to the US Department of Agriculture, a global production is reaching 211 million tons, or 36.1 kilograms per person — an all-time high.

The result is seen on the streets of Chiang Mai, where congress delegates saw sights undreamed of a generation ago — overweight Thai youngsters stuffing themselves with hamburgers and chicken legs from American fast food franchises.

16 killed in two
ambushes in
Algeria

ALGIERS, Jan 22: Sixteen soldiers have been killed by Islamic extremists in two ambushes, one near the town of Tizi Ouzou in the eastern Kabylia region, the other in the Tiarat region, 350 kilometres (220 miles) west of Algiers according to press reports Wednesday, reports AFP.

In Tizi, near Tizi-Ouzou, a group of Islamists killed nine young soldiers who were travelling in a supply truck from an army camp in the town, the reports said. Eight other soldiers were wounded.

Seven soldiers were gunned down in Tiarat after their vehicle was blown up by a landmine according to the newspapers.

The two attacks took place on Sunday the last day of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, bringing the total number killed during this Ramadan to more than 170.



A traditional Russian nesting doll for sale depicting, from left, two dolls of US President Bill Clinton, Monica Lewinsky, Paula Jones, Linda Tripp, and a small saxophone in front, on a market stall in Kiev, Ukraine, on Wednesday. The set of nesting dolls costs 80 hryvny (about \$12). — UNB/AP photo