

## French cable car crash kills 21

GRENOBLE, France, July 1: Twenty-one people died when a cable car taking staff to an international Alpine observatory fell 80 metres in southeastern France today, a local government (prefecture) spokesman said, reports Reuters.

He said there were no survivors in the car, which was taking staff at 7.30 am (0530 GMT) to the star observatory run by French, German and Spanish scientists on 2,700-metre-high (8,900-foot) Pic de Bure above the resort of Saint-Etienne-en-Devoluy, near the Italian border.

The cable car fell. We don't know why... These are working people and they are dead," the resort's mayor Jean-Marie Bernard told Radio France-Info, choking back tears.

The prefecture spokesman said 10 staff of a public works company, five scientists of the IRAM astronomical institute and telecommunications workers were among the victims of the crash.

Bernard said there were also villagers among the dead. The cable car was used only for the observatory and no tourists were believed to be on board.

There was no immediate word on the nationality of victims. It was the most serious cable car accident since 1976, when 42 people died in the world's worst such disaster in Cavalese, in the Italian Dolomites.



## Vice President of Zimbabwe dead

HARARE, July 1: Zimbabwean Vice President Joshua Nkomo died early today at a local hospital after a long illness, President Robert Mugabe announced, reports Reuters.

Nkomo, 83, had been one of Zimbabwe's two vice presidents since 1987 when his PF-ZAPU party merged with the ruling ZANU-PF of then-prime minister Mugabe.

One of the stalwarts of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle from the 1950s to the 1970s, Nkomo had previously served as home affairs minister in Mugabe's government from independence in 1980 until 1982, when he was dismissed on charges of plotting a military coup.

He always denied the charge and later was reconciled with Mugabe. The former guerrilla leader had been ill for some time prior to his death.

## Barak to present coalition govt July 7

JERUSALEM, July 1: Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak widened his coalition Thursday as a moderate party agreed to join, ensuring his government broad support for reactivating the peace process, reports AP.

After more than five weeks of coalition negotiations, Barak announced Wednesday that he had the numbers to form a government. Sources from his One Israel bloc told Israeli media that Barak would present the coalition to the parliament on July 7, just two days before the legal deadline.

The leader of the Center party, former Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, said after a meeting overnight with other party members that it would be part of the new government. Center has six seats in the new parliament.

The move brings the expected size of the new coalition to 75 seats, a wide margin in the 120-member parliament, the Knesset.

## N Korea walks out of talks with South

BEIJING, July 1: Communist North Korea today walked out of talks with South Korea over reuniting separated families, repeating earlier demands that Seoul should apologise for a sea clash last month, South Korean officials said, reports AP.

The two Koreas failed to set the date for the next round of talks. The North side demanded we apologise and we promise to prevent any further armed provocations. South Korea's chief delegate Yang Young-Shik told reporters after the meeting, "I can't help but say this is very disappointing and regrettable," he said.

We pointed out in history there is no case like this where the head delegate reads a prepared statement and leaves," Yang said. He said talks, which began at 3:00 p.m. (0700 GMT) ended after one hour and 25 minutes. The top negotiators held 10 minutes of private talks.



Indian Home Minister Lal Krishan Advani (2nd L) is flanked by Indian combat troops on Wednesday at the Kashmir frontline of Kargil and his daughter (C). Advani predicted that the conflict in Kashmir would be over by early winter, and ruled out any incursion by Indian troops across the border with Pakistan. — AFP photo

## 'Pakistan won't hesitate to use N-arms, if necessary'

ISLAMABAD, July 1: Pakistan would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons if necessary to protect national security in the Kashmir conflict with India, the ruling party's Senate leader, Raja Mohammad Zafarul Haq, said according to reports today, says AFP.

"Pakistan has the right to react with all military might at its disposal in case its security was threatened," Haq said Wednesday during a debate in the upper house.

The government will in no case compromise on the issue of Kashmir and Pakistan's security, he said.

He said nuclear capability was a deterrent against the 'aggressive' designs of India, which carried out atomic weapons tests in May 1998.

Pakistan followed with tests of its own the same month.

The News daily quoted Haq

as saying Islamabad would not refrain from using nuclear weapons if it became imperative to protect its security.

"The purpose of developing weapons becomes meaningless if they are not used when they are needed to be used," he said.

Haq however reaffirmed that Pakistan backed dialogue with India to defuse the crisis. He blamed New Delhi for the deadlock.

As the fighting continues in Kashmir, officials here have confirmed there have been informal contacts between Pakistan and India to explore ways to cool the tensions.

Former foreign secretary Niaz A. Naik, who met Indian premier Atal Behari Vajpayee in New Delhi last week, sounded a note of optimism in an interview with BBC on Wednesday.

Reports quoted him saying he was "hopeful" a process of

consultation and meeting between directors of military operations (DMOs) or more senior military offices of the two countries could start soon.

With Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif due back here overnight after talks with Chinese leaders in Beijing on the Kashmir crisis, Naik was expected to report to him on his private visit.

Naik said in the interview he was sure the process to defuse tensions would start moving after Sharif's return.

Officials termed Naik's visit to India as part of "track-2" diplomacy, a process originally launched several years ago by former diplomats, retired military officials and intellectuals of the two countries.

They pointed out that an Indian journalist, accompanied by an Indian foreign ministry official, met Sharif in Lahore before Naik's trip.

## Indian jets pound intruders, inch toward strategic peak

DRASS (India), July 1: Indian fighter jets pounded Pakistan-backed intruders on the Himalayan mountaintops through the night and early Thursday to help ground troops who are inching toward the main promontory overlooking a strategic frontier highway in Kashmir, reports AP.

It was the fourth night of air strikes aimed at preventing the guerrillas from resting or reorganising themselves, said Squadron Leader R K Dhillon, an air force spokesman in New Delhi.

The 24-hour air strike heralded the fiercest fighting so far between Indian soldiers and the intruders, causing heavy casualties soldiers and Afghan mercenaries who crossed the 1972 cease-fire line that divides Kashmir between the two nuclear armed neighbours.

Pakistan has said its troops

are engaged only in retaliatory shelling and have not crossed the Line of Control.

After seven weeks of fighting, Lal Krishna Advani, India's minister responsible for internal security, said Thursday: "Indian forces have successfully pushed the intruders to the wall.... Pakistan's game plan has been defeated completely."

Justifying the slow pace of army action, he said, "We can free the... area in days but that would mean an enormous cost vis-a-vis manpower. Advani spoke to reporters in Srinagar, summer capital of Jammu-Kashmir state, at the end of a two-day visit to troops and refugees.

On Tuesday, military commanders of India and Pakistan spoke on the telephone to find ways to end the fighting, a Foreign Ministry official said in

New Delhi. The telephone conversation between the military commanders is considered a follow-up to the exchange of messages between the two prime ministers last Sunday.

Niaz Naik, an emissary of Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, flew to the Indian capital unannounced and met Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, on Sunday.

On Wednesday, India claimed that it won control of five knife-edge peaks and ridges in disputed Kashmir, losing 25 soldiers on the snow-frosted cliffs and killing at least 40 intruders.

India claimed major successes above the vulnerable Drass sector, pushing back the guerrillas to within 1.5 kilometres (one mile) of the Line of Control. The fighters had

moved as far as seven kilometres (four miles) inside Indian territory, said Col. Bikram Singh, the Indian military spokesman, in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Pakistan denies its forces crossed the Line of Control (LoC) and says the fighters holding the heights are linked to the more than a decade-old struggle by native Kashmiris against Indian rule in their homeland.

India insists on Pakistan vacating the peaks before any talks can get under way.

The military confrontation started in early May in the disputed Himalayan region, which is divided into Pakistani and Indian zones by the fragile LoC.

India launched a military offensive to drive out the alleged Pakistan-backed infiltrators.

## Queen opens Scottish parliament

EDINBURGH, July 1: Britain's Queen Elizabeth on Thursday opened the first Scottish parliament in 300 years, an historic event seized upon by Scotland's nationalists as a first step on the road to independence, reports AP.

"Today is an historic day for Scotland," said the queen, addressing the 129 members of the new assembly and an audience including ambassadors from around the world and former James Bond actor Sean Connery who was in full Scottish Highland dress.

Prime Minister Tony Blair was absent, chairing knife-edge peace talks in Northern Ireland, which were set to resume at almost exactly the time that the queen officially opened the assembly.

"It is a moment rare in the life of any nation when we step across the threshold of a new constitutional age," said the queen, who expressed a veiled hope that the parliament would satisfy the Scottish desire for nationhood.

## States pledge more police for Kosovo peace-building effort

UNITED NATIONS, July 1: States attending a UN conference on peace-building efforts in the Serbian province of Kosovo on Wednesday pledged additional support for a UN police force, UN chief Kofi Annan announced, reports AP.

Annan told a news conference after hosting UN talks of 18 states, attended by 12 foreign ministers, the United States had confirmed Washington intended to make 450 police officers available, and would send 100 police trainers.

He said Canada, Germany, Italy and Turkey also had made pledges during the first meeting of the 'Friends of Kosovo' group set up by Annan last week.

The United Nations is seeking a total of 3,110 police officers, including border police, for law enforcement in Kosovo where ethnic tensions are still running high as Albanian refugees return to the province.

Civilian police are to number up to 1,800, with the border patrol amounting up to 250.

Some 1,000 officers will be assigned to a special unit.

Regular civilian police are to carry sidearms, while the special unit, to be used for crowd control and more difficult security issues, are to be more heavily armed along the lines of the paramilitary French gendarmerie or the Italian carabinieri.

The question of arming the police has not yet been officially decided, although UN officials say they almost certainly will be despite the objections of some Scandinavian countries.

"Arming the police is something we should give very, very serious consideration to," Annan said.

Should the final decision be made to arm the officers, it will mark the first time the United Nations has given weapons to its civilian police force at the outset of any of its peacekeeping operations.

Annan stressed that pledges would not be enough and that

police must be on the ground as soon as possible.

A senior US official said the meeting started out with existing pledges of 1,000 policemen which grew after urgent consultations with capitals. Germany pledged 200 police.

The world body is tasked with running Kosovo's civil administration in the aftermath of the 11-week North Atlantic Treaty Organisation bombing campaign which forced Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to halt an ethnic cleansing drive against the majority ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

NATO's KFOR peacekeeping troops, currently 24,000 strong, are responsible for law enforcement until the UN police force is up and running.

Annan said he thought it could take "about 10 years" to complete the reconstruction of Kosovo, although the United Nations would not necessarily rule the province for that long.

## BRIEFLY

**Speeding truck kills 20 in India:** A speeding truck ploughed through a tribal festival procession in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, killing at least 20 people and injuring 26. Press Trust of India (PTI) reported yesterday. Reuters says from New Delhi.

The news agency said the incident occurred on Wednesday night in Midnapore district, about 200 km west of the state capital Calcutta. Twelve people died on the spot, four on their way to the hospital and four in the hospital, PTI said.

**Lankan doctors call off strike:** Thousands of Sri Lankan doctors suspended a 17-day strike yesterday and began returning to hospitals after President Chandrika Kumaratunga offered to meet them to settle their grievances, officials said, Reuters reports from Colombo.

"We have sent a letter to the president to acknowledge the meeting on Friday and told her that we have suspended our strike until then," a spokesman for the Government Medical Officers' Association told Reuters. Some 4,500 doctors in hundreds of state-run hospitals began the strike on June 14 to protest against efforts to give provincial governments control over health services.

## Independence flag hoisted in Irian Jaya

JAKARTA, July 1: Demanding a separate state, a group of youths hoisted an independence flag Thursday in Irian Jaya province, raising concerns about possible conflict, the official Antara news agency reported, reports AP.

About 200 youths, led by independence activists Yance Hembring and Isak Yapsenang, attended the ceremony in front of the district chief's office in Nimbora.

The move caused tension in the provincial capital Jayapura, about 100 kilometres to the east, where almost all shops, markets, schools and offices closed, Antara said.

Police and soldiers were deployed to guard strategic and public facilities such as electricity plants, telecommunications, and fuel stations.

## N Ireland talks adjourned after deadline passes

BELFAST, July 1: Northern Ireland peace talks were adjourned without a breakthrough in the early hours today, but would resume later in the morning, a government official at the negotiations said, reports AP.

The news that the negotiations would go on even though a deadline of midnight Wednesday had passed without result gave hope that a settlement might yet be reached in the row over Irish Republican Army (IRA) disarmament.

The talks between Protestant Unionists and Catholic Republicans, which had begun Tuesday, broke up at 3:40 a.m. (0240 GMT), said a Northern Ireland Office spokesman.

The chairmen of the talks, British and Irish premiers Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern,

were expected to remain in the vicinity to go on with the negotiations later in the morning.

There were unconfirmed reports that they could resume around 11 a.m., suggesting that Blair would not attend the opening of the Scottish parliament at which he was due to give a speech.

Blair had imposed the deadline in what he said was the final attempt to break the 14-month deadlock which is jeopardising last year's historic peace deal.

The Unionists, who want to retain British rule in the province and have a majority in the new Northern Ireland assembly, are refusing to let Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, into the government unless de-commissioning starts.

## Indonesian police fire on Jakarta protestors

JAKARTA, July 1: Indonesian police opened fire with bullets and teargas to disperse some 300 protestors picketing the national election commission office here today, injuring at least 12, witnesses said.

Four of the injured demonstrators were injured by bullets, an AFP reporter said. More than 100 police, some in riot gear, began by firing teargas canisters, but the protestors, most of them from the People's Democratic Party (PRD), began to fight back, throwing empty bottles and stones.

A series of warning shots were fired into the air before the police charged with sticks into the protestors. Then bullets and teargas were fired.

One of those injured by a bullet was named as student, Bayu, from the Central Java town of Solo. The other, who was shot in the chest, was identified as Sutiyono.

Two other men with gunshot

wounds and two unconscious men with their heads bleeding were later carried out from an Indian cultural centre across the street where they had been hiding and rushed to a nearby hospital by taxi.

Members are only equipped with blanks and rubber bullets, Lieutenant Colonel Imam Haryatna of the Central Jakarta district police said.

He said the protestors had taunted the police by shoving and pushing the police cordon guarding the entrance to the office.

The protestors had come to warn of the return of "the forces of the New Order" — the government of discredited former president Suharto — when the People's Consultative Assembly meets in November to pick a new president.

They were from the People's Democratic Party (PRD), and were mostly young people and students.



Indonesian police beat back protestors with sticks outside of the National Election Commission building in Jakarta yesterday. At least eight were injured when police fired bullets and teargas to disperse some 300 protestors picketing the office. — AFP photo

## Washington releases classified Pinochet documents

WASHINGTON, July 1: The United States released thousands of classified documents on former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet Wednesday in a move human rights groups hope will shed light on abuses committed by his regime, reports AP.

These documents are part of a voluntary review of US government files related to human rights abuses, terrorism and other acts of political violence prior to and during the Pinochet era in Chile. State Department spokesman James Foley said in a statement.

More than 25,000 pages from 5,800 documents related to events in Chile from 1973 to 1978 were declassified, he said.

Some 5,000 documents came from the State Department, 490 from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 200 from the National Archives, 100 from the

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and 60 from the Defense Department.

"They clearly show that the United States was perfectly aware of the gravity of what was going on in terms of the atrocities and human rights violations from the time of the coup," said Jose Miguel Vivanco, a spokesman for the leading rights group Human Rights Watch.

It raises the question why US authorities kept silent and backed the regime, he said. The 83-year-old Pinochet, who ruled Chile from 1973 to 1990, is under house arrest in London, where he faces extradition to Spain in September on charges of genocide, terrorism and torture.

But in an interview published Wednesday, Chilean President Eduardo Frei suggested that Spain might be will-

ing to allow Pinochet to return to Chile.

Spain "has a better understanding" of Chile's reasons for asking for the former dictator to return home to face charges there, Frei told the Chilean daily, La Hora.

His comments came after a meeting Monday with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, in Rio de Janeiro, at an international summit there.

Human rights advocates and relatives of victims killed by Pinochet's military death squads have long called on the US government to release the classified materials to help bring the former strongman to justice.

But the declassification process is not without risks for the United States.

Pinochet took power in 1973 in a CIA-backed coup against democratically elected left-

wing president Salvador Allende and Chile's ambassador to the United States, Genaro Arriagada, suggested certain materials could prove embarrassing to former US officials.

One document from CIA archives that dates back to days immediately following the coup speaks of the "bloodshed" by Chilean security forces.

The Chilean ambassador said the declassification process "was limited, based on the United States' national security considerations and the need to protect its agents, as well as respect the privacy of individuals."

Foley conceded some documents remained classified, saying they pertained to "an ongoing Justice Department investigation" into the assassination of Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and his American aide Ronni Moffit, both murdered in

Washington by Chilean secret police in 1976.

Other materials were withheld to protect "sensitive law enforcement information, and intelligence sources and methods, or to prevent serious harm to ongoing diplomatic activities of the United States," Foley said.

Peter Kornbluh, director of the Chile Documentation Project at the National Security Archives, an independent pressure group, highlighted the limited number of documents released by the CIA.

The declassified documents are available to the public at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, with materials released by the State Department posted on the Internet at <http://foia.state.gov>.

Documents released by other US agencies will be available in cyberspace in mid-July.

## Off the Record



Italian Vittorio Innocente, 53, rides his mountain bike some 30 metres under water off Portofino, near Genoa on Wednesday in an attempt to get an entry in the Guinness Book of Records. — AFP photo

## Madonna mad at manager

NEW YORK: Pop singer Madonna has filed a 2 million dollars complaint against her former business management firm and an accountant, accusing them of mishandling her taxes in 1992, court papers showed on Wednesday, says Reuters.

Named in the civil complaint, filed late Tuesday in Manhattan Supreme Court, was Padell, Nadell, Fine, Weinberger & Co. and at least a dozen members of the management firm. The complaint accused them of breach of contract and malpractice.

Bert Padell said the issue revolved around Madonna's taxes in 1992, when the business managers listed California as her residence.

New York officials said she was a New York resident and demanded 2 million dollars in back taxes, which Madonna paid.

She now wants her former business managers to make restitution for the back taxes, he said. Accountant David Levin was also named. The suit seeks a minimum of 2 million dollars in compensatory and punitive damages.

## All for scoring zero in a test ....

HANOI: A Vietnamese student has been sentenced to 12 months in jail for beating his teacher after he scored zero in a mathematics examination, a court official said yesterday, says AP.

Trang Tan Gia, 17, beat his teacher's head with a stone after he dismissedally failed the second-term examination in May, the official told AP.

The Bac Lieu provincial people's court on Tuesday ordered Gia's family to pay his teacher's hospital costs.

## Pilots in panic

LONDON: British airline pilots are threatening not to fly to eastern Europe and Asia over the New Year for fear that the millennium bug will affect some countries' air traffic control systems, reported the Independent newspaper yesterday, reports AP.

A study conducted by the British Airline Pilots Association found "serious shortcomings" in most countries' preparations for the millennium, especially in the developing world, reported the paper.

It said that flights from British airports between December 31 and January 3 will be extremely restricted due to the fear that unprepared air traffic controls in Africa, Central and South America, parts of Asia, and eastern Europe could endanger lives.