

International

BRIEFLY



A man and the only woman of the Moroccan Royal Guard march on the Place de la Concorde during the French Bastille Day parade in Paris Wednesday. In a rare honour, Moroccan soldiers opened France's traditional celebrations, the first foreign troops to walk by themselves along the Champs-Elysées.

— AFP photo

Amartya Sen arrives in Calcutta: Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen on Tuesday arrived in Calcutta on a three-day visit to see his ailing mother at Santiniketan, PTI reports from Calcutta.

Sen would hold a meeting with Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and Finance Minister Dr Ashim Dasgupta on July 17. The meeting would hold discussions on issues related to spread of primary education in the state, Sen told newsmen.

Blast kills one in Lanka: A bomb explosion killed one man and wounded several others at a town in eastern Sri Lanka today, officials here said, AFP reports from Colombo.

The blast went off opposite a police station in the town of Batticaloa, 300 kilometres east of here by road, officials said. There were no immediate claims of carrying out the attack. The blast came as security forces and police remained on red alert for Tamil rebel attacks in the island's north-east as well as elsewhere during a month when the rebels celebrate two land-mark anniversaries.

Morauta new PNG PM: People's Democratic Movement leader Mekere Morauta was elected as new prime minister of Papua New Guinea (PNG) on Wednesday, Xinhua reports from Canberra.

PNG Parliamentary Speaker Iairo Lasaro announced Morauta had won the vote for the top job by 99 to 5. The only other nominee was East New Britain Governor Francis Koinanrea, AAP said. Morauta becomes the sixth man to lead PNG since it gained independence in 1975.

Heavy rains kill one in Japan: Heavy rains lashing Japan killed one man, injured three other people, triggered 94 landslides and flooded 192 homes, police and firefighters said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The rains, moving westwards across Japan since the previous evening, were held responsible for the death of a 64-year-old man in northern Japan's Iwate prefecture. "He left the house because he was worried his boat might have shifted away. He was found dead under a bridge by his niece," said a fire department official in Iwate.

Sudan peace talks Sunday: The next round of peace negotiations between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) will be held in the Kenyan capital Nairobi from Sunday, the government has said, AFP reports from Khartoum.

Junior Foreign Minister Gebriel Rorec said that was notified of the date two days ago by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which sponsors mediation between the government and SPLA, according to Wednesday's Akhbar Al-Youn daily. The rival sides are due to resume discussions on a "declaration of principles" set by IGAD, Rorec said. The regional grouping, though some of its members are at odds, has been endeavouring to end conflict wracking south Sudan since 1983.

Indonesia polls fair, transparent: EU Megawati seen winner

JAKARTA, July 14: European Union observers said today Indonesia's June 7 election was fair and transparent despite a slow vote count and they expected populist opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri to win, reports Reuters.

"I am still a little concerned at the slowness, but I believe personally that the count will be finished in a very short space of time now," chief EU observer John Morgan told a news conference winding up the EU operation.

The count will reflect the vote cast by the people of Indonesia. Therefore, I believe the actual voting process was fair and transparent.

"The count is not finished yet, but I have little doubt myself that the results will differ from the percentages we have today by a maximum of two points."

So far, less than 60 per cent of votes have been formally tallied. The General Election

No winners in Kashmir war

Istan has been internationally isolated, but nobody will remember this six months down the road.

Meanwhile, India will be forced to pour enormous resources into Kashmir, and maintain permanent forward deployment of troops at substantial cost, in order to prevent a similar infiltration in the future," he said.

India was taken by surprise by the incursion across the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Indian- and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

The infiltrators were only detected on May 9, although reports suggest they first began setting up mountain-top bunkers on the Indian side of the LoC in early winter last year.

The resulting battle was fought on Pakistan's terms, in a place and at a time chosen by the intruders.

While Pakistan was viewed

globally as the aggressor, the

Indian commandos free 12 hostages in gunbattle with militants

Shelling in Kashmir as infiltrators pull out

SRINAGAR, India, July 14: Crack Indian commandos on Wednesday rescued 12 people held hostage by Muslim separatists in Kashmir, reports AFP.

A source in the Border Security Force (BSF) said a unit of the elite National Security Guard flew in from New Delhi Tuesday and started the rescue operation at 5:30 a.m. (0000 GMT) Wednesday at the BSF camp at Bandipur.

The rebels had occupied the first floor of a two-storey building at the high-security military camp.

Tuesday's rebel attack on the camp was the first of its kind since a Muslim secessionist campaign broke out in Indian Kashmir in 1989.

Reports from Islamabad said a Pakistani militant outfit called the Lashkar-i-Toba said it carried out the attack, which came two days after Islamic militants began to withdraw from Kashmir after two months of fighting Indian troops.

takers was killed trying to escape on Tuesday and another was killed on Wednesday morning. "There appear to be no (militant) survivors," he said.

Another official said three militants, whom he claimed were backed by Pakistan, died in the gunbattle about 65 kilometres north of the Kashmiri summer capital Srinagar.

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Meanwhile, India and Pakistan traded artillery fire over the Kashmir border Wednesday, as Islamic infiltrators continued to withdraw on foot from Indian territory.

Three Indian military personnel were injured when a Pakistani shell hit their vehicle during the night at a checkpoint near Kargil on the main Srinagar-Leh highway that runs through Kashmir.

Indian guns opened up in retaliation Wednesday morning, military officials said.

While the artillery units continued their daily duels, air and ground assaults remained suspended ahead of the Friday morning deadline set by India for the complete withdrawal of all Islamic infiltrators to the Pakistani side of the border.

The withdrawal came after two months of intense fighting, which cost more than 1,000 lives on both sides, as India sought to evict the infiltrators

who had set up bunkers on strategic heights in Indian Kashmir.

Indian officials have confirmed that the intruders are pulling back, although a senior Pakistani official angrily denied that New Delhi had ever informed Islamabad of a deadline for the retreat.

"That is just a pack of lies," foreign secretary Tariq Altaf said in a radio interview on Tuesday.

"It is absolutely wrong on the part of India to make such a claim."

India said the deadline was accepted by Pakistan during a meeting at the weekend of senior military officials from both countries.

It also warned that any infiltrators remaining on the Indian side of the border after the expiry of the deadline would be "treated as hostile and dealt with accordingly."

Congress, AIADMK to contest polls together

NEW DELHI, July 14: India's main opposition Congress party forged an electoral alliance today with the regional party held responsible for toppling the Hindu nationalist-led coalition government, reports AFP.

The Congress party and the regional AIADMK party agreed to contest the staggered September-October elections together after a 45-minute meeting between their leaders in the southern city of Madras, the United News of India said.

The AIADMK, based in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, is led by a film actress-turned-politician, Jayalalitha Jayaram.

The Congress election slogan for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections would be "Sonia Lao, Desh Bachao, Sone ke Waqt Nahin Hain" (bring Sonia as the leader, save the nation, this is not the time to sleep). Raj said addressing a press conference at the (Gandhi Bhawan) MPCC office in south Mumbai.

He expressed the view that there was a Sonia wave in the country which would enable the Congress to sweep to power at the centre.

He also said Sonia Gandhi,

the Italian-born Congress president, would tour the state as part of the joint electoral campaign with the AIADMK.

The Hindu nationalist government lost a parliamentary confidence motion on April 17 by a single vote, sparking the third elections since 1996.

The first stage of polling in the general elections will take place on September 4.

PTI adds: The Congress would project Sonia Gandhi as its Prime Ministerial candidate to provide a stable and strong Government at the centre, former union minister Kalpanan Rai said yesterday.

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Khamenei orders clampdown Hundreds of thousands attend rally

TEHRAN, July 14: Iran's supreme leader ordered a clampdown on violent anti-government protests on Wednesday as hundreds of thousands of people attended a rally here called to show support for the Islamic regime, reports.

The people will not allow acts of destruction and the Islamic republic will repress it," Iran's supreme leader and spiritual guide Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a message to the nation broadcast on radio.

Conviction on charges of engaging in "counter-revolutionary" activities is punishable by the death sentence in the Islamic Republic.

Meanwhile that persons arrested during rioting here over the past two days would face trial as "counter-revolutionaries."

Those responsible for violent clashes with the security forces here on Monday and Tuesday are "bandits and saboteurs," conservative deputy speaker of parliament Hassan Rouhani told a huge rally at Tehran University.

"We expected the reaction from the United States and the Zionist regime (Israel) but certain other countries are making a mistake by lending their support," he said.

He warned that Iran would "respond at an opportune time" but did not cite any country by

name other than the United States and Israel.

Several hundred thousand people, many carrying pictures of Khamenei and his predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, attended the mass rally at Tehran University called by the Organisation for Islamic Propaganda, the government's main propaganda body.

"My life belongs to the guide," read messages on some of the pictures carried by the demonstrators.

"Death to America," "Death to Israel" and "Death to the hypocrites," the demonstrators shouted in a reference to the People's Mujahedeen, the armed opposition movement based in Iraq, reports AFP.

Khamenei, who is also commander in chief of the armed forces, ordered the security forces and Islamic militia volunteers to "repress corrupt and counter-revolutionary elements" and "reestablish public order."

He accused "bandits" supported by bankrupt political groups and encouraged by foreign enemies of being behind the unrest.

"Mean and wretched enemies of Islam and the revolution imagine that Iran's revolutionaries would let them pave the way for the dominance of the criminal US over Iran through their mischievous acts," he said.

They imagine that the people have grown tired of Islam and the Islamic revolution and want to take revenge on the revolution," he added.

"But the faithful, brave and vigilant people of Iran will not permit them, their masters and their supporters to go on with their vicious acts and the powerful Islamic system will severely crush them down," he warned.

But news reports quoted him as ruling out "military consequences," saying a launch would spark an "economic and diplomatic" response.

Branding the Taepodong missile a "potentially destabilising weapon," Bosworth said Pyongyang's next move would test whether it was ready to swap dangerous confrontation for peaceful engagement with its foes.

North Korea fired a missile over Japanese air space last August and concern has risen lately that it may be preparing to test a missile with an even longer range.

"We can only state as clearly as possible that another firing of a long-range missile would have serious consequences for the improvement of relations with North Korea," Bosworth added.

Diplomatic sources, meanwhile, said US Defence Secretary William Cohen was expected to visit Japan later this month for talks with Japanese officials on the North's missile development.

Cohen will meet Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura and Defence Agency chief Hosoi Norota around July 27 and 28, the sources said. Media reports said Cohen would then travel to Seoul for talks on the topic.

Earlier today, US ambassador to South Korea Stephen Bosworth told journalists that another missile firing would seriously jeopardise ties with Washington at a time when it was prepared to "improve relations across the board."

Pyongyang, however, angrily defended its right to fire off satellite-carrying missiles and lashed its enemies for trying to rein it in.

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London pushes ahead with N Ireland law

LONDON, July 14: The British government on Wednesday pushed ahead with a draft law to install a power-sharing Belfast executive by the end of the week, hoping against the odds to win over Northern Ireland's Protestant leaders, reports AFP.

The bill will spend two days in the upper chamber, the House of Lords, after being rushed through the lower house of parliament, the House of Commons, where it was approved late Tuesday by 343 votes to 24 after eight hours of impassioned debate.

But British Prime Minister Tony Blair's goal of devolving powers to a Belfast executive on Sunday looked in difficulty as Protestant leader David Trimble told MPs late Tues-

day he did not want to impose an Israeli blueprint for peace, because "coming from me, that blueprint will have a virus."

16-member new govt appointed in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, July 14: Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah appointed on Tuesday a 16-member new government with nine new faces following last week's Cabinet resignation, reports Xinhua.

Sheikh Jaber made the appointment based on a proposal presented by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, the new agency KUNA reported.

There are still six members of the royal Al-Sabah family who were named in the new cabinet. Former ministers of foreign affairs, defence and interior, all senior members of the ruling family, all retained their key portfolios.

Oil Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah also remained in his post. However, Minister of Finance and Minister of Communications Sheikh Al-Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah was replaced by Ahmad Abdallah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, a banker.

Former Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Mohammad Deifallah Sharar succeeded in the new cabinet.

Abdul Wahab Mohammad Al-Wazan was named as the new Minister of Commerce and Industry, and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs.

Kuwait's last cabinet resigned under the constitution on July 4, after final results of the country's parliamentary elections were officially announced.

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