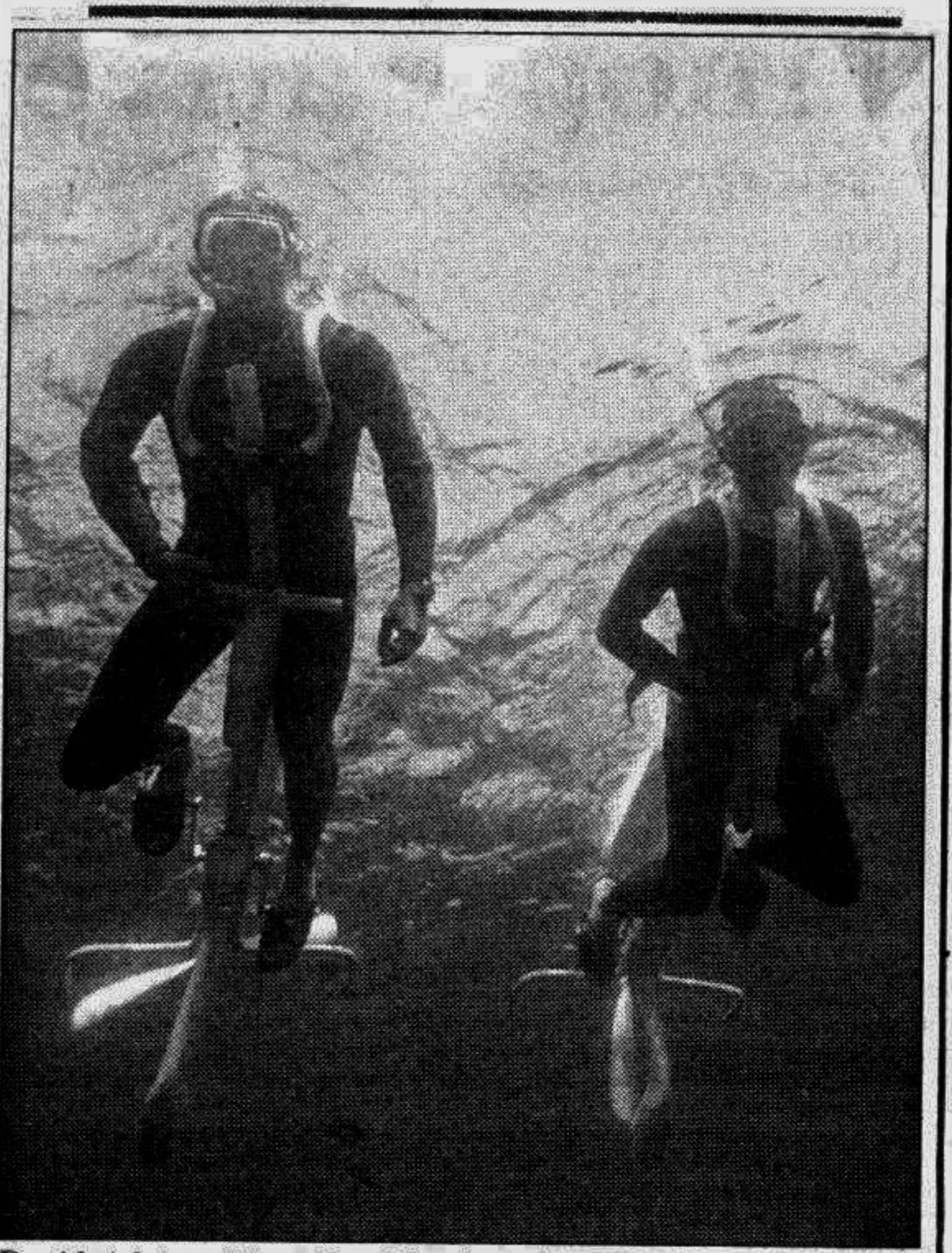


## BRIEFLY



David Adrian (L) and a friend cruise on submarine cycles which he invented at la Seyne-sur-mer on July 19. The cycle is claimed to reach a speed of 5 km per hour on the surface and underwater twice as fast as using fins.

—AFP photo

### Albright to visit ME in mid-Aug:

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Tuesday announced that she would travel to the Middle East "around the middle of August" to help restart the stalled peace negotiations. Xinhua reports from Washington.

Speaking at a news conference in the State Department, Albright acknowledged there would be difficulties to push the peace process forward despite the fact all the sides concerned in the negotiations expressed their confidence and optimism.

### Russian FM to meet Jaswant:

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov would hold bilateral talks with his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh during Asean Regional Forum (ARF) meet in Singapore next week to discuss a wide range of issues including regional security and bilateral interaction. PTI reports from Moscow.

A Russian foreign ministry spokesman said yesterday that both the ministers would be representing their countries at the meet.

### Next G-8 meet in Miyazaki in Japan:

Japan yesterday announced venues for meetings preceding next year's Group of Eight (G8) summit. Reuters reports from Tokyo.

Deputy government spokesman Munio Suzuki said the cabinet had decided that G8 foreign ministers would meet in the city of Miyazaki, while a meeting of finance ministers would be held in the city of Fukuoka. Both are located on the southern main island of Kyushu.

### Nicaraguan plane missing with 16:

Nicaraguan officials searched on Tuesday for a commercial plane carrying 14 passengers and two crew members which disappeared after it took off from Managua for Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, authorities said. Reuters report from Managua.

The Cessna 208 Caravan owned by Nicaraguan airline La Costena left Managua at 10 am (Noon EDT/1600 GMT) for the coastal city of Bluefields, 180 miles (300 km) east of the capital.

### Over 1,300 die of AIDS in Vietnam:

A total of 1,341 people have died of AIDS and another 14,034 people are known to be HIV-positive in Vietnam, an official from the National Committee for AIDS Prevention said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

However, because testing is only done selectively in Vietnam, most cases go undetected and the actual number of infections could be 10 times the documented number.

He said the latest documented figures were correct as of July 10.

### Editor of Iranian daily detained:

An editor of a moderate Iranian newspaper was detained Tuesday for publishing an article that allegedly distorted Islam and insulted the divine prophets, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported, AP said from Cairo.

It said Kazem Shokri, who works for the moderate Sohreh Enrouz daily, was imprisoned Tuesday after being served a detention warrant pending trial. It said Shokri was editor of the daily's center pages.

### 6 militants killed in Assam:

Indian troops and police gunned down six militants in the country's northeastern state of Assam in separate clashes in a pre-police offensive against separatist guerrillas, police said yesterday. Reuters reports from Guwahati.

All the killings occurred late on Tuesday. Police said the soldiers killed three militants from the Bengali Tiger Force at Panbari in Darrang district, about 70 km (44 miles) from the state capital, Dispur.

### Unnamed plague claims 9 in Russia:

A mysterious killer virus spreading across the south of Russia has left nine dead and more than 100 hospitalised, with Russian experts stumped as to the nature of the disease, news agencies reported, says AFP from Moscow.

Authorities in the region have banned the sale of food on open markets, swimming holes have been declared off-limits, and hundreds of people have fled from their homes in fear of the highly infectious disease.

### 29 miners trapped in China:

Some 29 miners have been trapped for nine days 150 m underground in east China's Shandong province. Xinhua reports from Jinan.

At 5:30 pm on July 12, water started rising in the iron ore mine belonging to the Laiwu Iron and Steel Group in central Shandong. A total of 160 miners were evacuated in time, but the others were trapped.

## Basque separatists score major political victory

22 leaders freed in Spain

MADRID, July 21: Spain's Basque separatist movement on Wednesday scored a major political victory when 22 former leaders were released after the Spanish constitutional court overturned seven-year prison terms against them, reports AFP.

In its first response, the Spanish government said the ruling was "positive" and called on the public to accept it, despite widespread public condemnation of political violence in the Basque country.

Hundreds of overjoyed relatives and parents, cheering and chanting Basque slogans, gathered outside prisons across gates in the Basque region to greet the former detainees as they walked to freedom.

The 22 former leaders of Herri Batasuna (HB), the political wing of the outlawed separatist group ETA, had been in prison since December 1997 on charges of "collaboration with an armed group."

A 23rd HB leader, Jon Idiogo,

was 61, sentenced at the same time, had been freed in May for health reasons.

The 23 had been found guilty of "collaboration with an armed group" after they had released an ETA video during the party's campaign in elections in 1996.

But the verdict also coincided with a climate of public condemnation of Basque terrorism after the assassination of a young Basque country councillor, Miguel Angel Blanco.

The verdict was overturned eight to four on Tuesday by the constitutional court after the judges wrangled for weeks over the wording. They said the sentencing "harmed the rights" of the defendants by invoking a given article of the penal code.

The ETA, whose name means Basque Fatherland and Liberty, waged a 30-year campaign for independence that left nearly 1,000 people dead before it declared an unlimited ceasefire last September.

Her allegation could not be independently confirmed.

### 44 killed in Congo church bombing

BRAZZAVILLE, July 21: A bomb attack left 44 people dead at a church in Congo at the weekend, a local legislator said yesterday, reports AFP.

The attack occurred during mass at a church in Mouyondzi, some 160 kilometers (100 miles) west of Brazzaville, lawmaker Jacqueline Mamouni said over pro-government Radio Liberte.

Mamouni, who is from Mouyondzi, blamed the attack on supporters of ousted president Pascal Lissouba.

Her allegation could not be independently confirmed.

The newspaper said one of Indonesia's top neurosurgeons had examined Suharto.

Suharto ruled Indonesia for 32 years. Although forced from office by riots and protests last year, he is still regarded by many as a key behind-the-scenes political operator.

The Jakarta Post quoted sources close to Suharto's family as saying the old autocrat was overcome by the stroke and collapsed in his bathroom at his private residence in central Jakarta on Tuesday.

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