



A file picture dated March 3, 1997 of Moroccan King Hassan II (L), flanked by his son, Crown Prince Sidi Mohamed (R), hearing the presentation of greetings in the 36th anniversary ceremony of the monarch's enthronement in Rabat. King Hassan II of Morocco died on Friday after being hospitalised earlier in the day with an acute pneumonia, sources close to the royal palace said.

World leaders mourn death of King Hassan

LONDON, July 24: World leaders mourned Morocco's King Hassan, with President Bill Clinton calling his death on Friday a great loss for the Middle East, reports Reuters.

The Arab world's longest-ruling leader died of a heart attack, aged 70, shortly after being admitted to hospital in the Moroccan capital Rabat with pneumonia.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres said: "He was a visionary, a believer in peace. He supported it, dreamed of it and fought for it."

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat decreed a three-day mourning period in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The president recalled the respected stand of his majesty in defending the rights of the Palestinian people in establishing the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital," a Palestinian cabinet statement said.

King Hassan was a discreet but key mediator in the Middle East peace process. His contacts with Israeli leaders led to the 1978 peace accord between Egypt and Israel and he formed low level ties with Israel in 1994.

He also chaired the Jerusalem Committee, made up of members from Arab and Is-

lamic states, aimed at supporting Palestinian in the Holy City.

Clinton expressed his condolences to the king's son and successor, Crown Prince Sidi Mohammed, said Michael Hammer, a spokesman for the US National Security Council.

Hammer said Clinton would shortly put out a statement "expressing his heartfelt condolences to the King's family and to the people of Morocco and that this was a great loss for the Middle East as a whole given the king's role in pushing forward the Middle East peace."

He added: "We look forward to a new relationship with the Crown Prince and keeping the excellent ties between our countries."

He said: "Our view is the Middle East has lost one of its greatest peacemakers."

Israel's Peres, a personal friend of the king, said: "He was pushing and promoting peace in the Middle East in any manner he could. With his passing we lose one of the most experienced and wisest leaders that this region has enjoyed in the last half century. 'For me personally, I am losing a very dear friend,' said Peres, a Nobel peace laureate and minister of regional development in new Israeli prime Minister Ehud Barak's government."

Vajpayee rules out talks with Pakistan

NEW DELHI, July 24: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee virtually ruled out peace talks with Pakistan while Indian soldiers fought Islamic guerrillas in India-controlled Kashmir, a newspaper report said Saturday, reports AP.

It is difficult to say when the talks will be held," The Statesman newspaper quoted Vajpayee as saying on Friday. There are several steps Pakistan will have to take to create an atmosphere of trust, Vajpayee said.

He didn't identify these steps on Friday. But in a telephone conversation with US President Bill Clinton earlier in the week, Vajpayee said all intruders must be withdrawn from Indian territory and Pakistan must halt "cross border terrorism" in Kashmir.

India accuses Pakistan of training and arming Islamic militants fighting a separatist war in Kashmir since 1989, a charge Pakistan denies.

Pakistan says it provides only moral and diplomatic support to the guerrillas. India and Pakistan, the world's newest nuclear powers, claim all of Kashmir and have fought two wars over its control since they won independence from Britain in 1947.

A meaningful dialogue between the two sides is unlikely before a new government assumes office in New Delhi in October. Voting for the Indian parliamentary elections is sched-

uled for September.

On Friday, Vajpayee rejected the Indian opposition charge that there was intelligence failure in detecting intrusion by hundreds of armed guerrillas into Indian territory. "There was no failure," he said.

However, nearly 800 intruders moved undetected nearly seven kilometres (four miles) deep into Indian territory in Kashmir and occupied mountain positions which the Indian soldiers had vacated at the start of winter last September.

India says the infiltrators were mostly Pakistani soldiers. But Pakistan says its soldiers were not fighting in Kashmir and the intruders were Kashmiri rebels.

The intruders attacked the Indian forces when they tried to get back to their positions after the snow began melting in May. India responded with massive airstrikes and ground attacks, raising the spectre of a full-blown war with Pakistan.

On Saturday, Indian soldiers moved closer to two remaining pockets of Islamic guerrillas near the ceasefire line that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan. After ten weeks of latest fighting, India has evicted intruders from most mountaintop positions in its territory.

Under pressure from the United States, Britain and other western countries, Pakistan urged the rebel groups to withdraw and end the conflict.

but a few groups of insurgents have clung to their positions. Fewer than 100 of the Islamic fighters who occupied mountainous parts of Indian-held Kashmir remain, the Indian military says.

Indian attempts to clear these pockets have been hampered by thousands of plastic land mines and heavy rain.

FTI from Moscow says: Russia supported India's military action against the Pakistani intruders who have refused to withdraw from the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) and demanded immediate stop to cross-border terrorism.

According to the information received Indian troops were forced to resume military action in number of regions in Kashmir against a small number of armed groups and militants who have been entrenched there using support from Pakistan, who continue to carry out anti-Indian activities, the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement.

We insist, as before, on full and unconditional withdrawal of armed groups, which infiltrated into the Indian territory across the LoC, and on prevention of Trans-border terrorism, the statement said.

Meeting of these conditions could only start resumption of the Lahore process aimed at creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding between New Delhi and Islamabad, it said.

Pakistan won't help arrest Laden: Minister

ISLAMABAD, July 24: Pakistan will not allow use of its territory for any action against Saudi dissident and alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden, reports Saturday quoted Interior Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain as saying, reports AFP.

Hussain said Pakistan was not involved in any operations for the arrest of bin Laden from his sanctuary in neighbouring Afghanistan, The Nation reported.

His remarks followed a flurry of unconfirmed reports in the local press that American commandos were in Pakistan for an operation to detain the alleged terrorist after Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia spurned US demands to expel him.

Several religious groups in Pakistan have voiced fears the US, which last year attacked suspected bin Laden terrorist camps in Afghanistan with cruise missiles, was ready to carry out similar raids.

Hussain, denying the presence of American commandos in the country, said Pakistan had nothing to do with the issue of extraditing bin Laden.

"This is a matter between the United States and Afghanistan," the minister said, adding Pakistan would not "allow (use) of its land for any action against Osama bin Laden."

Hussain dismissed as "totally baseless" claims by some religious leaders alleging a deal was struck over bin Laden dur-

ing Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's July 4 talks with President Bill Clinton in Washington.

The head of the country's main fundamentalist group Jamaat-i-Islami, Gazi Hussain Ahmed, warned the government Friday of serious repercussions if it assisted any US operation to arrest bin Laden.

Jang newspaper, in a report from Peshawar quoting Afghan sources close to bin Laden, said the Saudi dissident had moved to a secret hideout made up of fortified bunkers.

The refuge is guarded by some 450 Arab mujahideen, along with hundreds of local fighters, the report said.



A paramilitary trooper stands alert outside the United States consulate building in Karachi yesterday. Police have reportedly tightened security for American diplomatic missions amid continuing reports in local press about possible US operations in Afghanistan to arrest alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden.

14 Serbs gunned down in Kosovo

GRACKO, Yugoslavia, July 24: Fourteen Serbs were gunned down late Friday in Kosovo in the worst incident since KFOR troops entered the province in mid-June, a KFOR spokesman said Saturday, reports AFP.

British Major Ian Seraph said a patrol responding to two reports of automatic weapons fire found the bodies in a field next to a combine harvester near the village of Gracko.

They were lying in a circle about five metre in diameter, and included a 15-year-old boy, while a fourteenth body was found about 150 metres away, slumped over the wheel of a tractor.

The reports came in at 9:15 p.m. (19:15 GMT) and the bodies were found an hour later.

All the victims were ethnic Serbs, and all had been shot, Seraph said. UN-appointed Kosovo's civilian administrator Bernard Kouchner on Saturday condemned the Gracko massacre as an "inhuman and senseless act".

Those who committed this despicable crime must be found

and brought to justice."

The UN Mission in Kosovo and the NATO-led KFOR peacekeeping force "will spare no efforts in investigating and prosecuting those responsible," Kouchner added in a statement released on the Kosovo capital Pristina.

The bodies were taken early Saturday to a morgue in Pristina, about 30 kilometres away, for formal identification.

After going to the fields and seeing the farm machine standing empty, the villagers reportedly became afraid and returned to their homes to call British forces who patrol the sector.

They said they had contacted an Albanian interpreter at a British post who told them no vehicles were available to come immediately.

A village resident called Stefan said several residents tried to call, but received the same answer. Eventually he went in his car to the post where he found an officer and several soldiers who returned with him to the village.

Stefan said the victims "in-

cluded the Zivic brothers. One has seven children. He was shot three times in the back."

"It was Albanian terrorists, cannibals," he charged.

He accused the KFOR of "complicity" with the ethnic Albanians.

Canadian KFOR troops sealed off the area with Coyote armoured vehicles, while military police continued their investigation.

The bodies could not be retrieved until a mine-clearing team was called in after a grenade was found at the scene.

Spokesman Major Jan Joosten said KFOR "condemns this despicable act and calls upon all leaders of the communities of Kosovo to do the same."

Seraph confirmed that two Albanian families had lived together peacefully with the Serbs.

He added that the killers had apparently not arrived by vehicle, and said the investigation would first concentrate on the type of weapons used and how the gunmen fled.



Canadian Army officer Christopher Hunt (L) consults with other soldiers from the Lord Strathcona Horse unit as they secure and patrol the village of Gracko where 14 Serb civilians were killed by unknown gunmen yesterday. The Canadian reconnaissance unit was called in by British KFOR commanders to secure and patrol the area.

China accuses US Congress of backing Taiwan

Clinton admn 'expands military ties with Taipei'

BEIJING, July 24: China accused the US House of Representatives on Friday of supporting Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui in his war of words over statehood with Beijing, reports AP.

The Chinese legislature's foreign affairs committee said a recent amendment passed by the House urged US President Bill Clinton get China to publicly renounce using force or the threat of force against Taiwan, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported.

The amendment "makes every effort" to back independence for Taiwan and supports recent remarks by its president that China and Taiwan should deal with each other on a "state-to-state" basis, Xinhua reported.

China was infuriated by Lee's comments in a July 9 radio interview, regarding them as challenging its view that Taiwan is a rebel province to be reunited one day with the Chinese mainland, Beijing accusing Lee of taking dangerous steps toward independence, something China has vowed to

resist by force if necessary. China's Foreign Ministry and its embassy in Washington have made "solemn representations" to the United States over the amendment to a State Department Authorisation Act, Xinhua said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said the amendment also seeks to provide weapons to Taiwan, "seriously infringes upon China's sovereignty and grossly interferes in China's internal affairs," Xinhua quoted him as saying.

He demanded that the Clinton administration prevent the amendment from becoming law.

China hopes to reunify Taiwan "through peaceful means, but it will not promise to abandon the use of force because there exist forces both in Taiwan and in the international arena attempting to split Taiwan from China," Zhu said.

Reuter from Los Angeles says: The Clinton administration has secretly expanded military ties with Taiwan over the

past three years, the Los Angeles Times reported in its today edition, quoting US and Taiwanese sources.

The newspaper said the expanded ties began after the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1996 when China fired missiles into the waters near Taiwan, and Washington sent two aircraft carriers to help protect the island. Taiwan is now caught up in a fresh dispute with China, which considers it a renegade province.

The Times said the more extensive relationship encompassed visits by Taiwanese military leaders to Washington and a sharing of ideas between uniformed officers about military strategy in East Asia and about Taiwan's response to a possible invasion.

The report added that the recent military contacts gave the Pentagon a considerably more intimate relationship with Taiwan than with China.

Taiwan triggered the latest crisis with Beijing last week by saying it no longer recognised the "one China" policy,

Hijacker warned of lax security at Tokyo airport

TOKYO, July 24: A knife-wielding Japanese hijacker of a jumbo jet warned last month of lax security checks at Tokyo's Haneda airport and bragged he could smuggle a weapon onto a plane, reports said Saturday, reports AFP.

The 28-year-old lone hijacker, who took control of a domestic flight Friday before being overpowered and was identified by police as unemployed Tokyo resident Yuji Nishizawa, sent an e-mail on June 19 to the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper in which he described in detail lax security systems at the airport, the daily said.

In the e-mail, titled "Problems of current security check conditions at the Haneda Big Bird," the hijacker said he was "confident of being able to bring a weapon into an airplane," it added.

He also mailed the same statement, around mid-June, to three airlines, Haneda airport police and the civil aviation bureau at the transportation ministry, the daily said.

The three airlines were Japan Airlines, Japan Air Sys-

tem and All Nippon Airways (ANA). The hijacker killed the pilot of an ANA flight Friday. He was overpowered and later arrested.

The Asahi, Yomiuri and Sankei dailies also reported the hijacker sent the letter to these airlines and the government authorities, but none, including the Mainichi, disclosed the precise contents of the document.

Jiji Press news agency said he wrote of ways to upgrade security measures in the letter, saying the airport "could be targeted by a large-scale terrorist organisation."

He even demanded airport authorities compensate for expenses of what he called "an investigation," Jiji Press said.

When an airport management company official phoned him, the hijacker argued the airport should increase the number of security guards and demanded it hire him for the job, according to Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK).

Because of the letter's detail, the transportation ministry held a meeting to discuss security check systems at Haneda airport, the Asahi Shimbun

said.

But neither the ministry nor the airport police decided to take specific measures, according to the Mainichi Shimbun.

Meanwhile, police on Saturday raided the hijacker's home in Tokyo. He lived with his parents and a grandmother, according to the Tokyo Shimbun.

"We searched his house today, and right now we are investigating his motive," a police official told AFP.

Police discovered the hijacker used to work at the Haneda airport as a part-time baggage handler when he was a university student, the Mainichi said.

The daily suspected he must have gained detailed knowledge of the airport security system from that job experience.

The daily also said the hijacker suffered from manic depression and recently jumped off a Tokyo building in a failed suicide attempt.

He graduated from the elite Hitotsubashi University and worked for a major freight company, but quit the job three years ago.

Clintons and Kennedys pay homage to JFK Jr

NEW YORK, July 24: President Bill Clinton joined several generations of grieving Kennedys Friday to celebrate the lives of John F. Kennedy Jr and his wife at a private service here one week after their deaths in a plane crash, reports AP.

Thousands of onlookers braved searing midday heat to line streets near the small Saint Thomas More Roman Catholic Church in Manhattan's tony Upper East Side amid tight security and a media frenzy throughout the roughly 90-minute service.

Three decades after he became a surrogate father to JFK Jr when an assassin's bullet took the life of president John F. Kennedy, Senator Ted Kennedy shouldered the grim burden of eulogising his nephew, saying he possessed "amazing grace."

"But like his father, he had every gift but length of years," the lawmaker -- whose other brother Robert was also slain and oldest sibling Joe died while on a World War II bombing run -- said in a tender eulogy leavened with humorous anecdotes.

"He had amazing grace. He

accepted who he was, but he cared more about what he could and should become. He saw things that could be lost in the glare of the spotlight. And he could laugh at the absurdity of too much pomp and circumstance," said Kennedy.

A source close to the family said that Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, JFK Jr's sister and the last surviving member of president Kennedy's family, hugged her uncle after the speech, which also paid tribute to JFK Jr's wife, Carolyn Bessette Kennedy.

Bessette family friend Hamilton South, gave the Carolyn's eulogy, "which underscored the simple aspects about who Carolyn was and the way she approached things," the source said.

A gospel choir closed the ceremony with a rendition of "Amazing Grace." Earlier, hip-hop music star Wyclef Jean sang "Many Rivers to Cross," a ballad about overcoming adversity made popular by reggae great Jimmy Cliff.

Kennedy, 35, Carolyn, 33, and her sister Lauren Bessette, 34, were killed last weekend when the small airplane he was

piloting slammed into the Atlantic Ocean off the Massachusetts coast.

A private memorial service for Lauren Bessette was to be held Saturday in the Bessette home town of Greenwich, Connecticut.

Friday's service came a day after their cremated remains were scattered near the crash site during a private ceremony Thursday aboard a US Coast Guard ship.

Following the ceremony, black-clad mourners solemnly left the church, many of them heading in a sombre procession for a reception nearby, some walking slowly, heads bowed, others arm-in-arm for support.

Caroline, 41, boarded a black limousine for the reception, but rolled down one window to wave at several hundred people packed tightly behind one of the barricades erected by police, who had sealed off several blocks around the church.

The crowd -- most of whom looked old enough to remember the heart-rending images of a three-year-old "John-John" saluting his father's casket -- cheered and waved back.

Fiji plane crash kills 17

SUVA, July 24: All 17 people on a Fijian domestic flight were killed Saturday when the plane crashed in bad weather into a cliff in rugged mountainous highlands, officials said, reports AFP.

The dawn Air Fiji flight was carrying eight foreign nationals -- five Australians, one New Zealander, one Chinese, and one Japanese -- and nine Fijians from the capital Suva to Nadi international airport, both on Fiji's main island of Viti Levu.

The aircraft was reported missing after failing to arrive at Nadi.

Police said Saturday that the plane, a Brazilian-built Bandeirante turbo-prop, appeared to hit a 600-metre (2,000-foot) escarpment near the village of Delalassakau, about 10 minutes after take-off.

"Emergency teams were rushed to the scene by every means possible," police commissioner Isikia Savua said.

"The first emergency crews to arrive at the wreckage reported it appeared there were no survivors."

Off the Record

Only for male winners

KUALA LUMPUR: A Catholic organisation will give a year's free supply of Viagra to two male golfers who score a hole-in-one in the Chequers Golf Classic tournament, a news report said Saturday, reports AP.

"The prize will only be available in the men's category," said Dr. Neville Fernandez, vice-president of the Catholic Doctors Association, the organisers of the tournament in August.

Pfizer, which manufactures Viagra, offered the prize after being approached as sponsors for the golf event, Fernandez was quoted as saying by The Star daily.

Around 70 people have registered for the tournament. The organisers have not yet determined the hole-in-one prize for women.

For joining beauty pageant

KUALA LUMPUR: High school authorities expelled a 17-year-old student after she participated in a local beauty pageant, a news report said Saturday, reports AP.

"I was shocked to read the expulsion letter," said Caroline Chung, who received the letter a few days after winning second place in last week's Miss Sarawak/Miss World contest in the eastern state of Sarawak.

She received penalty points on her discipline record for taking part in the contest, being twice absent from school and for wearing a black brassiere. Chung was quoted as saying by The Star newspaper.

She insisted that none of the participants wore any revealing or indecent dresses.

"I still want to study," said Chung, who aspires to be a surgeon. "I think it is not wrong to take part in the contest as the contestants are helping the needy."

Her high school could not be reached for comment.

Education officials in Malaysia, which is predominantly Muslim, discourage but do not ban students from participating in beauty contests.



Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg (R) and her daughter, Tatiana (L), leave the Church of St. Thomas More in New York City on Friday after a memorial Mass for her brother John F. Kennedy Jr. and his wife Carolyn Bessette Kennedy. Kennedy and his wife were killed in a plane crash off Martha's Vineyard a week ago.

— AFP photo