

BRIEFLY



A group of women take turns photographing each other next to the father of Communist China as they stand in front of a giant statue of China's late Chairman Mao Zedong yesterday in Beijing. China's Communist party could be headed for a "Cultural Revolution-like" campaign in its expanded party purge, as a result of the crackdown on the spiritual Falungong sect, according to analysts. — AFP photo

Indians, Pakistanis held in HK:

Hong Kong police have arrested 60 people from India and Pakistan for "unlawful assembly," a police spokesman said yesterday. The investigation is still ongoing on the 60 men, aged about 20 to 35, who were held late Thursday on suspicion of holding an unlawful assembly in the tourist-belt of Tsim Sha Tsui, he said. "They were suspected of trying to carry out unlawful activities," the spokesman added.

Blast kills 18 S African miners:

South Africa's AngloGold Ltd, the world's biggest gold producer, said yesterday 18 workers had died and one was missing after an underground explosion at its Mponeng Mine on Thursday night. Reuters reports from Johannesburg.

AngloGold said the blast some 2,700 metres (9,000 feet) underground at Mponeng Mine near Carletonville, 80-km (50 miles) southwest of Johannesburg, was thought to have been caused by methane gas.

Israeli, Arab MPs to visit Syria:

A delegation of 13 Arab Israeli members of parliament are set to visit Syria "soon," former Palestinian National Council president Khaled Fahum told AFP on Thursday.

Fahum said he had received permission for the visit from Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara, but said that no exact date had been set.

Finnish FM to visit ME:

Finnish Foreign Minister Tarja Halonen is to start a tour of the Middle East with a visit to Egypt, where she is set to meet President Hosni Mubarak on Monday, officials said here on Thursday. AFP reports from Cairo.

Halonen, whose country took over the six-month revolving presidency of the European Union this month, is also to meet her Egyptian counterpart Amr Moussa on Sunday to discuss a partnership agreement between the EU and Egypt. EU foreign minister approved the agreement last month.

5 Philippines soldiers slain:

Five soldiers were killed in an ambush by Muslim fundamentalist guerrillas in the southern province of Sulu yesterday, a military official said. AFP reports from Zamboanga, Philippines.

The soldiers were patrolling a remote village in Patikul town when guerrillas of the Abu Sayyaf group attacked with rifles and grenade launchers, local Marine Commander, Colonel Orlando Buenaventura said.

Anti-terrorism confce in KSA:

Nine Arab states and the Palestinians are to take part in an anti-terrorism conference in Saudi Arabia on Sunday, the officials Saudi news agency SPA said, AFP reports from Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz is to chair the three-day conference of interior and justice ministers in the Red Sea city of Jeddah to discuss measures to combat terrorism. Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen are to take part, along with the Saudi hosts, SPA said.

Suharto leaves hospital:

Former Indonesian president Suharto left hospital yesterday 10 days after suffering a stroke, witnesses said, AFP reports from Jakarta.

Pre-dawn fire kills 7 in Japan:

Fire incinerated at least seven people and left six others missing yesterday as it swept through an old wooden apartment block in western Japan, police said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Australian FM in East Timor:

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer arrived in East Timor yesterday for a 24-hour visit, the first by an Australian minister to the troubled territory. AFP reports from Dili, East Timor.

Chinese paper says

Falungong sect threat to communist rule

BEIJING, July 30: China today stepped up its attack on the exiled leader of the banned mystical Falungong sect Li Hongzhi, who is wanted by authorities, saying the sect posed a fundamental threat to Communist rule, reports AFP.

"Falungong intends to erode the minds of practitioners and manipulate them in a bid to have them contend with the government. It has posed a serious threat to the state and people," the official People's Daily newspaper said in an editorial.

"We should recognise that the current efforts to expose Li Hongzhi are a struggle which has an important bearing on the fundamental faith of communists... and on the destiny and future of the Communist Party and government," the paper said.

"It is a political struggle in the ideological sphere about winning over the broad masses

of the people," ran the front page opinion piece in the Communist Party mouthpiece.

Beijing on Thursday issued an arrest warrant for Li, who emigrated from China to the United States last year, on charges of disturbing public order. It requested international cooperation from Interpol member states.

The move came a week after China banned a Falungong and launched a major propaganda campaign against it and its New York-based founder.

But Li's aides told reporters in Washington that Li would be safe from extradition as long as he stayed in the United States.

Falungong, which appeals largely to middle-aged Chinese citizens with its promise of better health, stunned authorities in April by quietly organising a protest of some 10,000 followers outside central government headquarters in Beijing.

Blaze at Saudi wedding kills 40 children, women

RIYADH, July 30: Forty children and women died at a wedding in eastern Saudi Arabia as a blaze swept through a huge party tent, newspapers said Friday, reports AFP.

Al-Jazira said the regional governor and King Fahd's son, Prince Mohammad bin Fahd bin Abdul Aziz, offered more than half a million dollars in compensation to the bereaved families of Wednesday's tragedy.

The fire was triggered by an air conditioning unit which exploded, sending the burning tent crashing down on the wedding party in a village of Qatif province, the daily said.

The official news agency SPA on Thursday gave a death toll of 20 children and 17 women, on top of 132 others wounded.

At least three of the wounded have died of their injuries, said newspapers, which did not specify whether the bride was among the casualties. She was reportedly seated near the air conditioning unit.

More than 300 women and children were in the tent, segregated from the men in keeping with the Moslem traditions of Saudi Arabia.

51 bodies unearthed in Aceh

LHOKSEUMAW, Indonesia, July 30: Mass graves containing 51 corpses were unearthed in the war-torn western province of Aceh, and human rights activists said Friday they believed the victims were civilians massacred by the Indonesia military, reports AP.

Villagers in Beutron village, about 150 kilometres southeast of Lhokseumawe, discovered 31 bodies in two separate gravesites, and another 20 bodies in a ravine.

"The corpses looked like porridge," said Abdullah Saleh, a lawyer who helped lead the excavation of the graves on Wednesday and Thursday.

Last Friday, Indonesian military and police forces shot and killed at least 31 people in what they said was an operation against a rebel base. Human rights groups have expressed outrage, saying those killed were ordinary villagers.

Meanwhile, the official Antara news agency said the death toll was 52, with five others still missing.

Saleh, who is linked with Aceh separatist rebels, said he found the body of a relative in one of the graves. The relative has been accused by the Indonesian military of being a rebel leader.

La Col Widagdo, military district commander in West Aceh, denied the massacre report. "It's just not true," he told the Associated Press by telephone from Meulaboh, the capital of West Aceh.

Pakistan accuses India of anti-Islam campaign over Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, July 30: Pakistan today accused India of mounting an anti-Islamic propaganda campaign in order to win support from the West for its stance over the disputed Kashmir region, reports AFP.

"India perceives the West to be sympathetic to anti-Islamic sentiments and wishes to enlist its support by declaring the popular Kashmiris struggle as a manifestation of 'Islamic extremism'," a foreign office spokesman said.

New Delhi is also including Afghanistan in its propaganda offensive although "the same Afghans fought for the defence of the free world," the spokesman said.

India is using the "current Western attitude to the Afghans as a convenient handle," he told reporters adding "India wants the world to perceive reality through its own coloured glasses."

The spokesman Tariq Altaf said the origins of the Kashmir dispute were neither ideological, religious, nor border-based.

"It is purely the question of right of self-determination of a people usurped by force over half a century ago and maintained by brutal repression," Altaf added, accusing India of carrying out "ethnic cleansing."

He said the "alarming feature" of India's propaganda against the Kashmiris was "her desperate display, indeed use, of malevolence against Islam."

"The entire Islamic Ummah (nation) needs to be made aware of this phenomenon which indeed represents a civilizational onslaught against Islam."

The spokesman claimed that some 60,000 people had been killed in "brutal repression" of Kashmiris over the past years.

A son scorned?

KUALA LUMPUR, July 30: Hell hath no fury like a son nagged — a Malaysian woman discovered this when she was whipped by her teenager son tired of her scolding, a report said today, reports AFP.

The 40-year-old woman, a hospital attendant, reprimanded her son for hitting his younger sister and a quarrel broke out. The Sun newspaper reported.

As she continued nagging, the 17-year-old boy lost his temper, grabbed some electrical wire and lashed out at his mother, causing injuries to her hand and back, the daily said.

The woman later lodged a report and police detained the boy at her home. The teenager, a first-time offender, reportedly told police he blew his top after his mother struck the first blow.

Taliban deny report

Bin Laden agrees to leave Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, July 30: Alleged terrorist Osama bin Laden who is wanted by the United States has agreed with the ruling Islamic Taliban militia to leave Afghanistan, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said today quoting sources close to him, reports AFP.

Saudi Arabian millionaire bin Laden is looking for asylum in another country, according to the agency which operates from Peshawar in Pakistan.

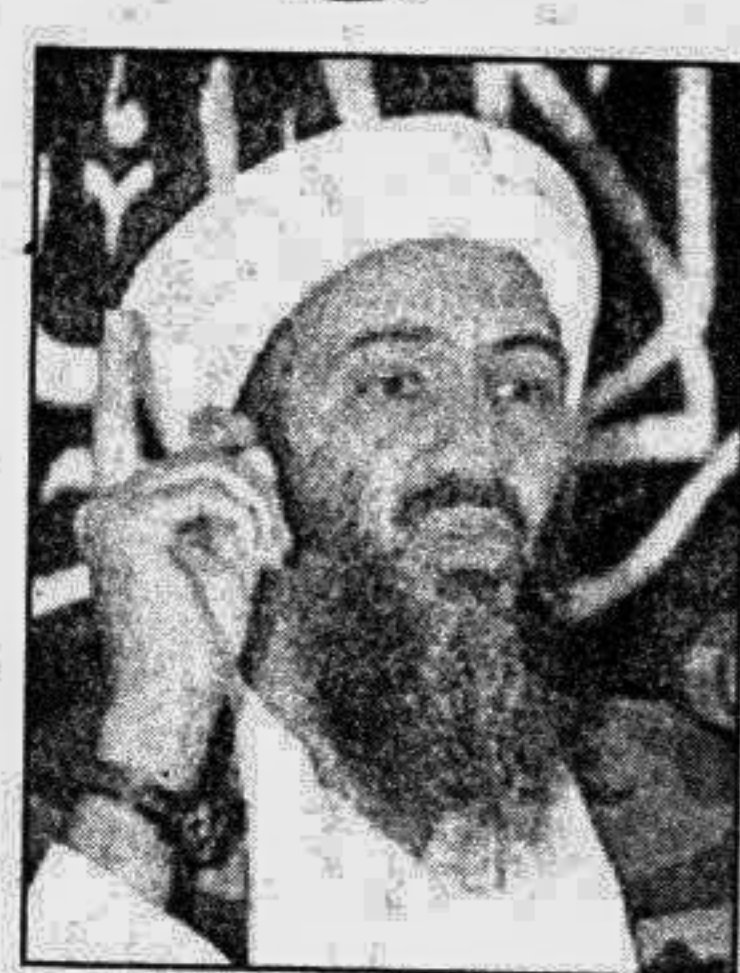
But it did not name which countries he had approached. The United States has posted a five-million-dollar reward for any information leading to the elusive bin Laden's arrest, accusing him of being behind the twin bombings of US embassies in Africa in August 1998.

The unnamed source told AIP if any Muslim country offered to take bin Laden and invited him the Taliban militia "is ready to extend full cooperation."

"Osama bin Laden has taken the decision in view of the possibility of an attack by the United States against Afghanistan and to ease difficulties being faced by the host country because of his presence," the source told AIP.

Although bin Laden's stay in Afghanistan had become increasingly difficult because of the danger of a US attack and the militia's curtailment of his activities, the Taliban "will never oust him forcibly," the source said.

Last August, Washington launched cruise missile attacks



An undated recent file picture shows Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden in an undisclosed place inside Afghanistan. — AFP photo

on suspected bin Laden terrorist camps in Afghanistan to hit back for the August 7 bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam which killed 224 people.

Bin Laden, who has been stripped of his Saudi nationality, is widely hailed by radical Islamic forces in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan as a hero of Islam.

The Taliban leadership has consistently refused US demands to expel him despite mounting pressure, rejecting allegations of terrorism against him and underscoring protection for bin Laden according to Islamic norms.

Washington earlier this month imposed economic sanctions against Afghanistan for harbouring the Saudi dissident.

An AP report from Kabul adds: The Taliban government on Friday denied a report that Osama bin Laden, who tops the US 10 Most Wanted list, was planning to leave Afghanistan.

"It is a totally baseless report that Osama has either left or is planning to leave Afghanistan," Maulawi Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, the Islamic militia's most senior spokesman, told The Associated Press.

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More suicide bombers in Colombo, police warn

COLOMBO, July 30: A day after a suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomber assassinated a top moderate Tamil politician, a police intelligence report Friday said two more bombers are hiding in the city, police officials said, reports AP.

"We are on the lookout for the human bombers, but it is extremely difficult to track them down," said senior superintendent of police, Rennie Perera.

Police and army conducted searches Thursday night for a 25-year-old Tamil woman from the northeastern town of Trincomalee and a man in his early 20s from the northern city of Jaffna. Perera declined to give details.

The way they operate makes it very difficult to apprehend them," Perera said about the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or LTTE, the main guerrilla group fighting for an independent homeland for the minority Tamils.

No one has claimed responsibility for Thursday's assassination of Tamil lawmaker Neelan Tiruchelvam by a man who detonated explosives strapped to his body.

The technique pointed to the LTTE which has been blamed for similar suicide bomb attacks on several politicians. In the last two years, they have been blamed for five attacks in the city that has left 70 people dead.

The suicide cadres are like VVIPs to the LTTE. They are brought to the city and kept in safe houses. They would be assassinated in the city just like other Tamils.

The LTTE yesterday responded to the strident call made by those who believe in a negotiated settlement of the Northeast conflict. They felled in a most heinous manner a very well-known intellectual and moderate Tamil political leader," English language daily The Island said in an editorial Friday.

Ta Mok to stand trial in 3 weeks

PHNOM PENH, July 30: Captured Khmer Rouge military chief Ta Mok will stand trial in a Cambodian military court for treason within three weeks, his lawyer and court officials announced Friday, reports AFP.

"We will hold Ta Mok's first trial within 20 days," said Benson Samay, the defence lawyer for the 73-year-old ex-rebel,

sassin is not told when and where he or she has to perform the job," Perera said.

The LTTE cadres roam about the city just like other Tamils residents and this makes it very difficult for us to track them down," Perera said.

Thursday's assassination could set back the government's efforts to solve the Tamil homeland issue. Tiruchelvam helped draft President Chandrika Kumaratunga's peace plan, expected to be formally submitted to the legislature next month.

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