

## International

## William marks 18th birthday

LONDON, June 21 : Britain's Prince William, second in line to the throne, turned 18 today but had to hold fire on his own coming-of-age celebrations because of imminent school exams, reports AFP.

While the rest of the royal family were gearing up for one of the biggest royal birthday bashes for a decade, William was busy revising for his A-levels with a history of art paper looming on Thursday.

The BBC marked the incipient adulthood of the pin-up prince by playing the national anthem early Wednesday morning, but the grandson of Queen Elizabeth was expecting a low-key birthday.

William, who is rapidly emerging as a replacement for his late mother Princess Diana as a media favourite, was not even due to make an appearance at a Windsor Castle shindig Wednesday evening, thrown to mark four royal birthdays this year.

## Barak racing against time to save coalition

## Another ally threatens to quit

JERUSALEM, June 21 : Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak prepared today for a fresh round of political horse-trading to salvage his tottering government as he faced new resignation threats from another key coalition ally, reports AFP.

Barak has until Thursday afternoon to persuade the powerful ultra-Orthodox Jewish Shas party to withdraw its resignation from the 11-month-old government, but the left-wing Meretz Party warned again today it too could bolt.

"We have signalled Barak that our party could quit his coalition," said Zehava Gal-On, head of the Meretz Parliamentary Party, which has 10 MPs. She told Israeli radio that

her party would object to any deal with Shas that involved transferring its ailing schools network from the Meretz-run education ministry, a key bone of contention.

"We do not accept bearing the brunt of this crisis by depriving Yossi Sarid of control of the Shas schools network to a new authority," she added, referring to the Meretz Party leader and education minister who has long been at loggerheads with Shas over the running of schools.

Shas's four ministers and three deputy ministers tendered their resignations on Tuesday afternoon following two weeks of political machinations over their demands for funds for the

schools and the legalisation of the party's pirate radio stations.

However, under the law, the resignations do not take effect for 48 hours.

Shas's departure would leave Barak with a minority government and could jeopardise Israel's peace efforts with the Palestinians, with a deadline for a final accord looming less than three months away.

Barak said on Tuesday he was seeking to form the "widest possible" government and wanted Shas to stay, although he insisted he would not bow to "coercion" and said 90 percent of the problems had been resolved.

Shas's four ministers and three deputy ministers tendered their resignations on Tuesday afternoon following two weeks of political machinations over their demands for funds for the



Heavily armed Indian marine commandos (R) approach people in a boat on Kashmir's famous Wuular Lake, some 60km north of Srinagar yesterday as Indian security forces step-up anti-militant operations in the Himalayan region. According to officials, nearly six hundred militants were killed by Indian security forces since January this year in separate gun battles.

— AFP photo

## Defence closes case in Anwar's sex trial

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 : Lawyers defending Malaysia's ex-deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim closed their case today and the judge ordered both sides in the sodomy trial to make written final submissions by July 6, reports AFP.

"We have closed our case and are not calling any (more) witnesses," defence counsel Sankara Nair told reporters.

Judge Arifin Jaka will then give his verdict at a date to be announced.

Arifin last week ordered the defence to close its case despite objections that there has been no final ruling on whether Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad should be forced to testify on Anwar's behalf.

The defence is appealing to the federal court, Malaysia's highest court, for permission to call Mahathir. Arifin and the appeal court have ruled that the premier need not obey a subpoena.

## NY subway train derails: 60 injured

NEW YORK, June 21 : At least 60 people were injured, three of them seriously, when a Manhattan-bound subway train derailed late Tuesday in the borough of Brooklyn, city officials said, reports AFP.

"Sixty persons were injured ... 10 have been taken to hospital," New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani told a press conference, adding that three people were in critical condition.

"Everybody has been evacuated from the train," a Transportation Authority spokesman said, adding that the derailment occurred as the train was pulling out of a station in downtown Brooklyn.

## 35 killed as storms ravage China's Fujian province

SHANGHAI, June 21 : Floods and landslides have killed at least 35 people in east China's Fujian province since heavy storms began June 17, the Liberation Daily reported today, says AFP.

Quanzhou city, the place hit most seriously by the storms, reported 30 casualties so far and economic losses of 1.17 billion yuan (141 million dollars), the paper said.

About 21,344 hectares (52,719 acres) of crop fields have been flooded in Quanzhou, over 95,000 residential houses have collapsed and more than 440 firms have been shut down, it added.



British pop star Elton John flashes the V-sign on stage late Tuesday in Brescia during the only concert of his tour in Italy.

— AFP photo

## Kashmir CM flexes legislative muscle

Srinagar, India, June 21 : Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah threatened today to push through a controversial autonomy plan, amid angry exchanges in the troubled Indian state's legislative assembly, reports AFP.

As opposition legislators accused him of playing up the autonomy issue to deflect criticism of his administration, Abdullah said he had instigated the debate in good faith.

"I could pass this resolution right now," Abdullah said, underlining the fact that his ruling National Conference party enjoys a two-thirds majority in the Kashmir assembly.

"But we want debate not just here, but in the rest of India."

The plan, which envisages full autonomy for the Muslim-majority state, except in matters related to finance, defence and communications, is bitterly opposed by the government in New Delhi, which sees it as a first step on the road to secession.

Speaking on the second day of a special week-long debate on the issue, Abdullah sought to

reassure the plan's critics. "We are not anti-India," he said. "Why can't the central government listen to our argument?"

National Conference officials say autonomy is essential to finding a lasting solution to the 10-year Muslim separatist insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir that has claimed more than 25,000 lives.

Opponents of the proposal argue that the insurgency must be ended before autonomy can be considered.

"First stop the gun culture in Kashmir and then we will support you over autonomy," said Chaudhary Piara Singh, a state legislator from Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party.

The BJP heads the coalition government in New Delhi, but has a negligible presence in the Kashmir assembly.

After the partition of the subcontinent into Pakistan and India in 1947, Kashmir's Hindu ruler acceded to India as Pakistani troops moved into the state.

They were seized on May 19 when Speight and a gang of special forces troops stormed parliament and said they were de-

## Fiji hostages set to be released today

Speight rejects ethnic Indians in future govt

SUVA, June 21 : A deal to end Fiji's coup crisis is set to be signed on Thursday, clearing the way for the release of elected prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry and other hostages who have been held in Parliament for 33 days, sources told AFP today.

There was no official confirmation that the crisis was near resolution. But the sources said coup leader George Speight and armed forces chief Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama would sign an agreement on an interim civil government on Thursday morning.

Retired banker Laisenia Garase was expected to be named prime minister.

The agreement will trigger the release of Speight's 31

hostages -- Chaudhry, his aides and most of his government.

They were seized on May 19 when Speight and a gang of special forces troops stormed parliament and said they were de-

posing Chaudhry, an ethnic Indian, in the name of indigenous Fijians. Ten days later the army declared martial law and has been negotiating with Speight ever since.

Fiji Television said the agreement between the military and Speight would be signed at 10:30 a.m. Thursday (4:30 BST).

Martial law spokesman Colonel Filipo Tarakikinikoi told Fiji TV that the "moment" was near.

"This is the closest we have come... we are coming to a close here and we should capture the moment and go forward with trust and determination and belief in the future of our country."

"We hope that George Speight and his team will take responsibility for coming to a resolution as soon as possible... and to go ahead. We cannot find a perfect solution."

Speight spokesman Jo Nata said it was the closest the two sides had come.

## N Korea calls on US to lift all sanctions

SEOUL, June 21 : North Korea today called on the United States to lift all sanctions in its first public reaction to Washington's decision to ease five-decade-old economic sanctions, reports AFP.

A foreign ministry spokesman accused the United States of taking "symbolic" measures with its move Monday to allow direct flights and trade in non-military goods with North Korea.

But in a move to ease international fears over its missile development programme, the spokesman said that a moratorium on its test launches remains in force.

North Korea and the United States are technically at war as the 1950-53 Korean War, in which the United States fought with the South, has never been formally ended.

US sanctions dated from the conflict.

rea's missile programme is expected to take place on June 28 in the United States.

The North Korean spokesman said: "If the US honours our sovereignty and free choice and sincerely work toward improved bilateral relations on the principle of equality and reciprocity, the DPRK will move in good faith and work to clear the US of its worries."

He added that a moratorium on test launches announced last September remained in force.

The spokesman said that the US move to ease sanctions will have a "positive effect" on the talks planned between the two sides "and the settlement of other outstanding issues."

"Now that preparations are going on for the Washington high level talks, the moratorium still remains in force," he said.

— AFP photo

## More than 150 killed in North Maluku

JAKARTA, June 21 : More than 150 people were killed and many more injured in Monday's attack by Muslims on Christians in Indonesia's Maluku Islands, a report said today, as the military expressed helplessness in the face of constant anarchy, reports AFP. A church activist was quoted by the state Antara news agency as saying 152 people were killed and 160 wounded when around 4,000 Muslim fighters attacked the mainly Christian village of Duma in Galesa district of Halmahera island on Monday.

Yerda Jawa, the activist at a church synod in neighboring Tobelo district, also said a number of women and children were taken hostage by the Muslim attackers.

Troops take Tigers' bunkers: 7 killed

COLOMBO, June 21 : Government forces attacked more rebel bunkers in northern Sri Lanka, killing six Tamil Tiger rebels as another rebel was shot dead in another clash, the government said today, reports AFP.

Troops attacked the bunkers of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at Tat-tuankottai in the Jaffna peninsula on Tuesday, killing three rebels, the government's Special Media Information Centre (SPIC) said.

It said three more Tiger rebels were killed when another bunker was attacked at Tanakkallappu on the same day.

Indian scores 24 in 33-yr

DUM DUMYA, India, June 21 : The responsibilities of parenthood appear to rest lightly on Mohammed Abdul, a labourer in northeast India, who has just fathered his 24th child at the tender age of 33, reports AFP.

"No regrets at all. It is all God's grace," Abdul told AFP, as he cradled the latest addition to his family, a baby girl, in the village of Dum Dumiya -- a remote Muslim hamlet in Assam state.

The baby's mother, 23-year-old Jahana, is Abdul's third wife.

He first married at the age of 14 and had six children before taking a second wife. He married Jahana when she was only 11 years old.

"Jahana fell in love with me and we got married," Abdul said. "Eight of my son's assist me in earning a livelihood. My eldest son should be 16 or 17 years of age. I don't remember exactly."

Abdul now divides his time between his three wives and two dozen children.

Indian women can legally only marry over the age of 18, but child weddings are still common in rural areas.



## Heat, drought claim 24 in Pak Punjab province

LAHORE, Pakistan, June 21 : Searing summer temperatures and a severe drought have claimed at least 24 lives in the past two days in the central Pakistani province of Punjab, police and hospital sources said today, reports AFP.

The hot weather is expected to break in the next couple of days and that should offer some respite," a government meteorologist said, adding that dust storms were on their way.

Many people die of heat related illnesses in Pakistan every summer but this has been one of the worst years in memory.

Hospital medical superintendent Junaid Ahmad, in Okara district 80 kilometres (48 miles) south of the provincial

capital Lahore, said three people had died in the area on Wednesday morning.

"Most of the deaths have occurred because of extreme dehydration," he said.

"I have advised people to drink 40 glasses of water per day but I understand the availability of water is another problem."

Government relief efforts have focused on the drought-hit districts in southern Punjab but residents in isolated villages have complained that many other areas are being ignored.

## Hopes of an end to Solomons conflict rise after peace talks

SYDNEY, June 21 : Hopes of an early end to the Solomon Islands conflict rose today after warring militia groups were brought together for the first time aboard an Australian navy vessel at sea, reports AFP.

Australia's foreign affairs department, which helped organise the meeting, said "amicable discussions" had taken place between the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) led by Andrew Nori and the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) led by Henry Tabani.

Christian church leaders initiated the meeting held on Tuesday aboard a landing craft off the capital, Honiara.

Nori described the meeting as "very productive," although

no spokesman for the IFM could be found for comment, Solomon Island Broadcasting Corporation journalist Alfred Inomae told AFP.

Nori also told reporters the two sides had discussed questions such as a ceasefire and an agreement had been reached for further talks which could be held as early as Sunday.

South Seas Evangelical Church pastor Reverend Michael Maeliu, a former politician and cabinet minister, was among mediators at the talks.

Inomae said the meeting had raised hopes of an end to the conflict which has seen a mass exodus of local residents as well as expatriates from Honiara.

Among them are some of the approximately 1,500 white

## Zimbabweans become refugees in own land

HARARE, June 21 : Thousands of Zimbabweans have become refugees in their own land after fleeing their homes when they became targets of brutal political attacks, reports AFP.

Many are sheltering in safe houses in cities and towns, or have moved in with friends and relatives away from their rural homes after being beaten up, raped, receiving death threats, or seeing their houses and property burned because they supported opposition candidates for parliamentary elections this weekend.

Inomae said the meeting had raised hopes of an end to the conflict which has seen a mass exodus of local residents as well as expatriates from Honiara.

— AFP photo

## Israel pledges to work with UN on border

JERUSALEM, June 21 : Israel pledged today to work with the United Nations to iron out lingering points of discord over its lightning withdrawal from Lebanon but said UN chief Kofi Annan considered it was meeting its commitments, reports AFP.

Israel is cooperating with the UN and if there is one point or another to be resolved we will do so," Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy told reporters before meeting Annan.

The United Nations declared five days ago that Israel had completed its pullout from Lebanon, which ended a bloody 22-year occupation on May 24.

</div