

## Blast kills one in Pakistan

LAHORE, Pakistan July 7: At least one person was killed and four seriously injured when a bomb exploded at a main bus stand in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore today, police and witnesses said, reports AFP.

The bomb was planted under a minibus shortly before it was to depart for the northern city of Gujrat, they said.

The blast, apparently triggered by remote control, badly damaged the vehicle and caused a large crater, witnesses said.

Police said four commuters inside the bus were critically injured while the body of an unidentified man was found near the vehicle.

The injured passengers are in critical condition with 'multiple fractures,' a police officer said.

No organisation has claimed the responsibility for the blast which came hours after the arrest of scores of supporters of deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Authorities said the arrests were designed to stop a planned procession by Sharif's wife, Kulsoom Nawaz, from Lahore to the western city of Peshawar on Saturday to raise funds for drought relief.

The military government which seized power in October has banned political rallies and accuses Kulsoom of trying to gain sympathy for her husband, who was jailed for life after the coup.

The so-called Sharif Loyalists group has claimed responsibility for several bomb attacks in the past but the interior ministry denies their existence.

## Indonesia extends house arrest for Suharto

JAKARTA, July 7: Indonesia has extended by one month the house arrest order on former President Suharto, who is being investigated for alleged massive graft, a spokesman for the Attorney General's office said today, reports Reuters.

Suharto's house arrest status, which is due to expire on July 12, has been extended until August 10, spokesman Yushar Yahya told Reuters by telephone.

"This will be the last stage. After that we expect to bring him to court," Yahya added.

## Indian army chief visits Myanmar military leader

BANGKOK, July 8: Indian army chief General Prakash Malik left today for Myanmar after meeting the leader of Myanmar's ruling military junta, Myanmar's state television reported, reports AFP.

Malik and his delegation held talks with Senior General Than Shwe, chairman of the state Peace and Development Council — the official name of the ruling regime, it said.

Than Shwe is also commander in chief of the military, prime minister and defence minister.

The talks at the People's Assembly in Yangon were also attended by other leading junta members and Yangon-based Indian diplomats, the report said.

## Presidential term Referendum in France Sept 24

PARIS, July 7: President Jacques Chirac said Thursday he would ask French voters directly to decide in a referendum on whether to approve a change to the constitution that would shorten the presidential term from seven to five years, reports AP.

In a speech broadcast live on TV and radio, Chirac said the referendum would take place September 24. The long-debated reform is likely to dim the luster of France's most powerful office by reducing the length of the presidential mandate.

Chirac said the reform would help breathe new life into French democracy, and asked the French people to vote yes to the referendum. He said the reform was desirable and necessary to give voters the chance more often to have a say in electing the head of state.

"It's your freedom and your right," Chirac said in the short speech.

Last month, both houses of the French parliament, the National Assembly followed by the Senate, overwhelmingly adopted a bill to cut the presidential term to five years. Chirac had expressed support for a referendum on whether to change the constitution, which provides for a seven-year mandate.

Chirac could have chosen to convene a special session of both houses of parliament, the Congress, to approve the change rather than a referendum. A Congress would have been a quick, easy way to get the measure past.

But Chirac, who is expected to run for a second term in 2002, chose the referendum, apparently in hopes that a strong yes would boost his popularity and authority. However, a low turnout could dent the president's prestige.

# Sino-US talks begin on arms non-proliferation

BEIJING, July 7: The top US arms control negotiator reopened non-proliferation talks with China today, signalling an end to a moratorium sparked by the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade more than a year ago, reports AFP.

John Holm, undersecretary of state for security and arms control, met with Chinese leaders early today after arriving on Thursday evening. US Embassy spokesman John Berry said.

The talks are aimed at paving the way for a visit to China by US Defence Secretary William Cohen next week, which will be the first by a US defence secretary since the bombing.

Holm's visit and Cohen's scheduled trip are indications both countries are ready to resume normal, top-level arms control discussions.

Military talks and contact, along with human rights dialogue, were frozen following the

May 7, 1999 bombing, which killed three Chinese nationals, injured more than 20 embassy staff and seriously damaged Sino-US relations.

Diplomatic sources said Friday that top items on the agenda for Holm and his counterparts included China's objections to US desires to build a missile defence shield to protect itself and a shield to protect its allies in Asia.

China has voiced strong opposition to the US plans, saying they would lead to an arms race. Beijing has objected even more adamantly to Taiwan being included in the US defence system, saying that would be a blatant interference in China's internal affairs.

The island, ruled separately since the Nationalists fled there after losing a civil war with the Communists in 1949, is seen by Beijing as an inseparable part of China which must be returned to the mainland, by force if necessary.

The US side, sources said, would be seeking to encourage Beijing to bring about a peaceful resolution to the stalemate between Beijing and Taiwan's newly-elected president, Chen Shui-bian.

Chen has rejected China's demand that he accept a policy recognising Taiwan as a part of China's sovereignty, and China has rejected Chen's offer to return to a compromise the two sides reached in 1992 in which neither would define the one-China principle.

US officials also may raise with Chinese leaders findings which allege China has resumed selling missile technology to Pakistan, sources said.

Though it remains to be seen how much can be achieved in the restart of arms controls talks between the two countries, China's neighbours in the region are applauding the start of discussions.

# Indonesia rejects foreign intervention in Maluku

JAKARTA, July 7: Three Indonesian Christian leaders were headed for Geneva today to plead for UN help in settling the bloody Muslim-Christian warfare in the eastern Maluku islands, as Jakarta flatly ruled out foreign intervention in the conflict, reports AFP.

"The Indonesian government strongly opposes any kind of foreign interference in Maluku," Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab told some 83 ambassadors and other diplomats called to the ministry here.

But he said Jakarta would welcome any humanitarian assistance friendly nations could provide for the tens of thousands of victims of the conflict, which has left some 4,000 dead in the past 18 months.

"It is hoped that the international community show their understanding and support for the efforts by the Indonesian government to restore law and order in the provinces of Maluku and North Maluku and to promote reconciliation among the people in these two provinces," he said.

"The government of the Republic of Indonesia also wel-

comes all international humanitarian assistance extended to the people of Maluku."

The three Christian leaders, headed by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Ambon, Monseigneur Mandagi, were in Jakarta Friday and would leave "immediately," for Geneva to meet with the UN Human Rights Commission there, the church said.

Christians have appealed to the United Nations before in writing, but the trip to Geneva is the first of its kind since the Muslim-Christian fighting erupted in Ambon city in January of 1999.

The violence has since spread throughout the island chain, creating more than half a million refugees, by government count.

The Indonesian government declared a civil emergency in Maluku and North Maluku provinces on June 28.

But the Christian crisis centre there said that since the emergency was declared, violence had escalated in the capital city of Ambon with, on at least one occasion, armed troops taking sides with the Muslims.

"We cannot see any improvement in the situation. On the contrary the situation is worsening from day to day," the crisis centre said in a statement.

Shihab, who argued that the conflict was "instigated by certain forces bent on destabilising the country," convened the Jakarta diplomatic corps after the European parliament, sitting in Strasbourg Thursday, added its voice to calls for international intervention in the Maluku.

In a resolution the parliament called on the 15 countries of the European Union and the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, to examine how the international community can help restore peace in the islands, "for example by sending international observers."

The Euro MPs also issued an urgent appeal for increased EU aid to the region and called on the Indonesian authorities to open humanitarian corridors to allow assistance to get through to people displaced by the fighting.



A man prays outside his destroyed house after an earthquake rocked cities along Nicaragua's Pacific Coast on Thursday. The quake, measuring 5.9 degrees on the Richter scale, killed at least four people including two children, and destroyed around 140 homes. The Nicaraguan Institute for Territorial Studies said the epicentre of the quake was northeast of Laguna de Apoyo, 20 miles southeast of Managua. — AFP photo

## 27 injured in Istanbul quake

ISTANBUL, July 7: Twenty-seven people suffered minor injuries as an earthquake measuring 4.2 on the Richter scale jolted Istanbul early today, Anatolia news agency reported, says AFP.

The epicentre of the quake, which hit at 3:15 a.m. (0615 BST), was recorded some 10 km south of Istanbul in the Marmara Sea, the Istanbul seismological observatory announced.

The tremor did not damage buildings, but 27 people were hospitalised with minor injuries after jumping from windows and balconies, Anatolia said.

There was no evident panic in this city of 12 million people, which has been frequently rocked by aftershocks since two massive quakes devastated northwest Turkey in August and November of last year, killing some 20,000 people.

Friday's tremor was not an aftershock, but a separate quake, the head of the Istanbul seismological institute, Ahmet Mete Isikara, said.

Engineer and geophysicist Mehmet Ercan said the tremor could be a warning of a major quake.

## Four killed as quake shakes Nicaragua

MANAGUA, July 7: Nicaragua was bracing for possible aftershocks today to an earthquake measuring 5.9 degrees on the Richter scale that killed four people, injured at least 45 and caused widespread damage southeast of here, authorities said, reports AFP.

Some 200 homes were destroyed and streets buckled in the area of Laguna de Apoyo, where the quake was centred, some 30 km southeast of the capital, according to police, who are still assessing the damage from Thursday's quake.

Vice President Enrique Bolos surveyed the damage — which included lakeside villas owned by cabinet officials including President Arnold Aleman — and put the disaster area under a "red alert," allowing federal troops to take part in rescue efforts.

An aftershock registering four on the Richter scale hit the region about two and a half hours after the first quake, followed by several smaller tremors.

Fire trucks and aid vehicles were on the scene and 14 air force helicopters circled the area looking for people trapped

in the debris.

"There are broken beds, total destruction, crumbled walls, gates off their hinges," a woman told a radio reporter.

A nine-year-old girl and a six-year-old boy died when a wall in their home collapsed over them near the epicentre. Details on the other two deaths were unavailable.

Local Civil Defence chief Alex Arevalo said some 3,600 people lived in the affected area, adding that shelters were under construction to put up some 250 people left homeless by the earthquake.

"We heard thunder and suddenly the earth opened up. We thought we were going to die," said Maria Sanchez Ortiz, 60, who was sitting down to dinner at home with her granddaughters when the tremor struck.

"We could see the water in the lake rising and all the walls of the house started to fall apart. The road to higher ground was destroyed," she said.

"We tried running towards the lake, but we could barely walk. It was terrible. I've never gone through something like this. Thank God we're alive," Sanchez said.

# Trial of Khmer Rouge leaders UN, Cambodia finalise draft accord

PHNOM PENH, July 7: The United Nations and the Cambodian government have finalised details of a draft accord for the trial of former leaders of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, the UN and Cambodian officials said, reports AFP.

Outstanding technical issues surrounding the trial were agreed on late Thursday in Phnom Penh by UN chief lawyer Hans Corell and government officials, and now must be debated in the Cambodian parliament.

"The ball is now in the government's court, everything is prepared now for the discussion in the National Assembly," Corell told reporters late Thursday.

He said the most substantive points of the accord — sharing the appointment of prosecutors and judges — had already been

agreed on by Prime Minister Hun Sen and UN secretary general Kofi Annan in an earlier exchange of letters.

The Cambodian government's chief negotiator confirmed that final details of the draft laws and the international accord had been hammered out.

Now, the matters agreed to need legislative approval in Cambodia.

"Next is that we (the government) have to prepare very well to go to the National Assembly," senior minister Sok An said.

Corell arrived on Tuesday, to wrap up a tortuous series of talks on a trial for leaders of the brutal movement blamed for the deaths of up to two million Cambodians between 1975 and 1979.

The UN has been trying to ensure a trial has international

credibility, while Cambodia has expressed concern that a trial for Khmer Rouge leaders could harm the process of national reconciliation and infringe its sovereignty.

Cambodia's civil war ended in 1998 with the collapse of the Khmer Rouge insurgency.

Friday morning Corell was accompanied by a senior advisor to Hun Sen to view a possible court building for the trial, the national theatre on the banks of the Mekong River, which is currently under renovation.

"We have shown Chaktomok Theatre to Mr Corell as a possible courtroom," Om Vienting told reporters. "The UN technical experts will come study it in detail before making a final decision."

## Five killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, July 7: Two Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel and a policeman were injured when militants fired more than half-a-dozen grenades at an ITBP camp and engaged police in a shootout at two separate places in Kashmir Valley since last Wednesday, reports PTI.

Elsewhere in the valley, three militants and a university student were among five people killed, while two special police officers were abducted by militants after a shootout in Rajouri district during the period, an official spokesman said here yesterday.

The spokesman said body of one person was picked up by police from ghat-Chundina in Ganderbal area on the outskirts of Srinagar yesterday.

## Storm death toll rises to 26 in Philippines

MANILA, July 7: Typhoon Kai-Tak wreaked havoc in the northern Philippines today, leaving 26 people dead and more than 700,000 homeless, relief officials said, reports AFP.

Kai-Tak, upgraded from a tropical storm, hovered in the South China Sea off the coast of the main island of Luzon at midday Friday, the weather bureau said, a day after Typhoon Kirogi left for Japan after unleashing heavy rains and floods.

The twin storms displaced about 703,000 people in Manila and other parts of northern Philippines.

Some 31,000 were being sheltered in government build-

ings, the civil defence office here said.

The government agency counted 18 deaths, four injuries and 11 missing from drowning, landslides and other typhoon-related accidents.

The Red Cross tallied eight deaths not reflected in the government figures.

The floods and landslides cut off roads and slowed rescue efforts as well as hampering the delivery of food and other essential supplies to the marooned population.

Agriculture Secretary Edgar Angara said about 1,600 hectares of rice farms were hit as were about 59 hectares of fisheries.

## Russia ready to reduce N-warheads

MOSCOW, July 7: President Vladimir Putin has promised the mayors of the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki that Russia is committed to reducing the number of its nuclear warheads, the Kremlin reported Thursday, reports AFP.

"We are firmly committed to gradual and comprehensive disarmament by the five leading nuclear powers," the Russian leader wrote in a letter addressed to mayors Tadatoshi Akiba and Ichiro Ito.

"Russia is ready to consider reducing its nuclear arsenal to 1,500 warheads," Putin was quoted as saying in the Kremlin communique.

The five established nuclear powers are Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

Putin expressed support for nuclear-free zones being set up around the world, saying "Russia is a signatory to most international agreements on the creation of such zones."

"We also support efforts towards new regions of nuclear non-proliferation being created on the Korean peninsula, in the Middle East, in Central and Eastern Europe, and in Central Asia," he said.

The mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- the two Japanese cities razed to the ground by US atomic bombs in 1945 -- had written to Putin with questions on non-proliferation in May after Russia ratified the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was rejected by the US Senate.

Putin referred to US insistence on pursuing a plan to build a National Missile Defence (NMD) shield which would violate the key 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

## India wants to involve pvt sector in new water policy

NEW DELHI, July 7: India, facing the challenge of providing adequate water for its one billion citizens, aims to involve the private sector in a new water policy under formulation, government officials said today, reports Reuters.

Water Resources Minister Arjun Charan Sethi told a meeting of the National Water Resources Council, a top policy-making body that includes state chief ministers and federal government ministers, that the policy also aimed to boost community participation in water management.

The council met in New Delhi to discuss a draft of the policy which would set the ground for government action, which is considered urgent in view of environmental challenges on the one hand and a poor spread of public water supply.

"One of the major challenges of the future will be to meet the demands of an expanding economy and increasing population for water," Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said in his inaugural speech.

The World Bank, which has been working closely with the Indian government, said in a statement today that more than 75 per cent of India's rural population, accounting for some 520 million people, do not have access to public water supply.

Groundwater, which faces problems of depletion, supplies 80 per cent of water for domestic use in rural areas and perhaps 50 per cent for urban and industrial uses, it said.

Vajpayee said success in solving India's water problems would depend on building a comprehensive information system on water resources, a mechanism for integrated development and management of river basins and inter-state agreements on river water sharing.

## US, S Korea set to agree on missile range extension deal

SEOUL, July 7: South Korea and the United States are close to agreeing a deal which will allow the South to increase the range of its missiles, officials said today, reports AFP.

US ambassador to Seoul Stephen Bosworth said in an interview with the Yonhap news agency the two sides were set to agree to South Korea extending its missile range under the Missile Control Technology Regime (MCTR).

He said South Korea and the United States were in the "final stages" of negotiations over the deal and were due to hold a last round of talks soon.

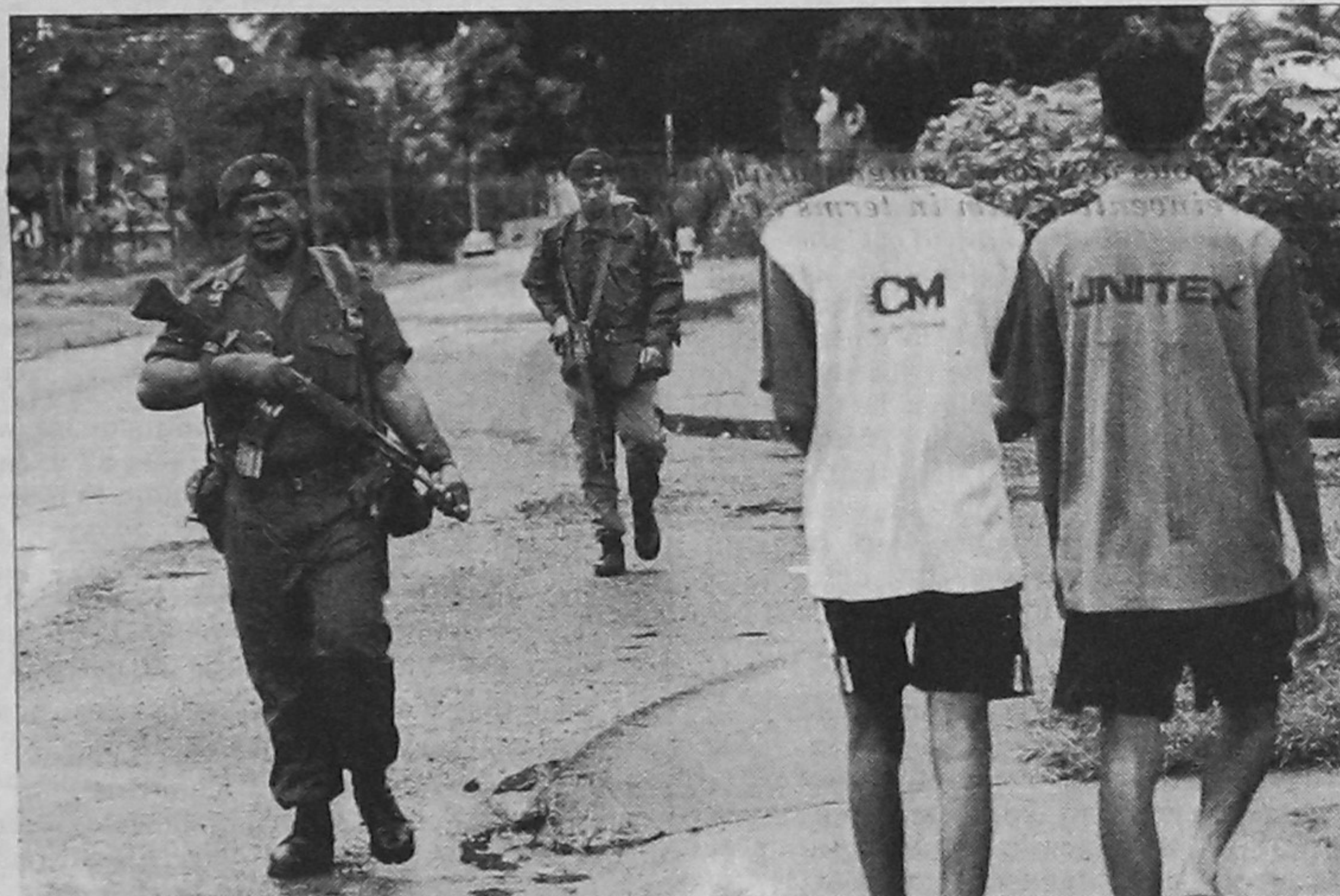
South Korea's existing missile range is limited to 180 km under a bilateral agreement with the United States.

The MCTR, an international agreement with 32 member countries, allows for development of missiles up to a maximum range of 300 km capable of carrying a 500-kilogram payload.

"We are in the final stages of successful negotiations which would have important benefits in enabling South Korea to join the MCTR," Bosworth said.

Asked if joining the MCTR would enable South Korea to extend the range of its missiles, Bosworth said "Longer range than it currently has under the bilateral agreement (with the United States). It would be able to go out further."

A senior official in South Korea's Foreign Ministry confirmed the negotiations.



Fijian soldiers patrol near the parliamentary complex in the capital Suva yesterday. The military has enforced an exclusion zone around the complex, giving residents and rebels until midnight of July 7 to leave the area. — AFP photo

## BRIEFLY

### Manila to establish ties with N Korea:

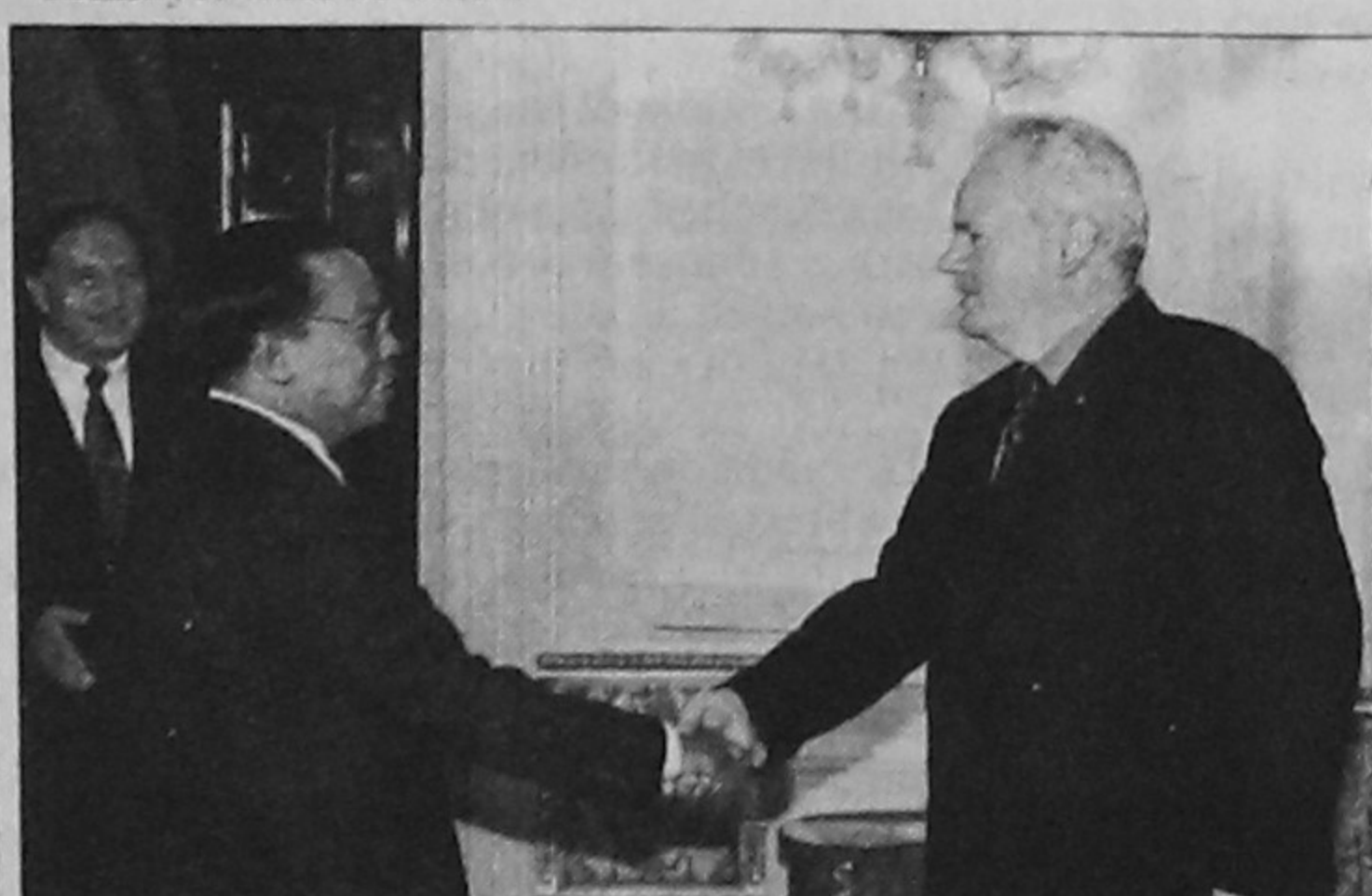
The Philippines and North Korea will move toward establishing diplomatic ties next week during the visit of a senior Pyongyang official to Manila, the chief spokesman of the Philippine government said Friday, Reuters reports from Manila.

The Philippines and Myanmar are the only members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which do not recognise North Korea. The 10-nation association has invited North Korea to join the ASEAN Regional Forum, a 22-nation security grouping which also includes the United States, Russia, Japan, China, South Korea, India and Australia, at a meeting later in July.

### Bus crash kills 27 in Spain:

At least 27 people were killed and 11 seriously injured when a bus carrying teenagers collided head-on with a truck near Soria in northern Spain on Thursday, AFP reports from Gornayo, Spain.

The Red Cross was sending special medical teams with experts in trauma counselling to the crash site. The accident took place on the national highway linking Zaragoza with the Portuguese border at 3:50 pm (1950 BST), near the village of Gornayo, west of Soria.



Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic (R) shakes hands with Myanmar Foreign Affairs Minister Win Aung during their meeting in Belgrade on Thursday. Both chambers of the Yugoslav parliament voted in favour of constitutional changes that would allow Milosevic to seek a new term. — AFP photo

## Y'slav parliament changes constitution

BELGRADE, July 7: The Yugoslav parliament on Thursday adopted constitutional changes that would allow President Slobodan Milosevic to stand for a new term, a move that has provoked a spate of criticism among his opponents in Serbia and reformist politicians in Montenegro, reports AFP.

The changes also provide for the selection of upper house deputies by a national vote rather than by the republics' parliaments, downgrading the influence of Montenegro, the junior partner in the Yugoslav Federation which has a much smaller population than the dominant Serbia.

Both chambers of parliament adopted the changes that would allow Milosevic, internationally isolated due to his indictment by the UN tribunal for war crimes in Kosovo, to seek a new term after his mandate expires in 2001.

The changes call for direct presidential elections for a four-year mandate, and would allow the same candidate to stand for the post twice.

Currently the president is elected by the parliament for a non-renewable four-year term.

The parliament immediately held a joint session after the measures were adopted to officially proclaim the constitutional amendments.

While Milosevic's allies hailed the changes during the sessions, opponents warned the measures would have strong repercussions for the country.

# Lanka faces int'l pressure over new censorship

COLOMBO, July 7: International media rights groups today put pressure on Sri Lanka to lift new censorship on local and foreign media, reports AFP.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said the fresh censorship imposed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga last week went against assurances they were given last month.

"When a CPJ delegation visited Colombo in mid-June, we were assured that the administration was moving away from its censorship policy, but these new regulations belie that commitment," the CPJ said in a letter to Kumaratunga.

While government censors no longer actually red-pencil news stories, the group complained journalists have now been asked to censor themselves.

"The CPJ objects to censorship in any form, but we find that a system that forces journalists to censor and check themselves can be even more pernicious than one in which the government directly censors material," it said.

Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres (Reporters Without Borders, RSF) expressed concern over Kumaratunga's use of emergency laws to reintroduce censorship a day after the Supreme Court ruled an earlier censorship was illegal.

"The government is now outside the rule of law because it did not respect the decision of the highest jurisdiction in the country," said RSF general secretary Robert Menard.

The government imposed blanket censorship on May 3 as Tamil Tiger rebels mounted a ferocious offensive in the northern Jaffna peninsula. On June 5, the government eased the rules on the Colombo-based foreign press.

However, when the censorship was gazetted again on July 1, a day after the Supreme Court ruling that the May 3 censorship had no force in law, the government said journalists were expected to censor themselves.