

International

Rebels kill 4 troops in Manipur

GUWAHATI, India, July 18 : At least four Indian paramilitary troops were killed and one critically wounded today in an attack staged by tribal separatist rebels in the far eastern state of Manipur, police said, reports AFP.

A police spokesman said a platoon of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were on a routine patrol near in Churachandpur district, 60 km from Manipur's capital Imphal, when they were attacked by armed militants.

"About 25 CRPF personnel were on a routine road patrol when militants of the outlawed United National Liberation Front (UNLF) opened indiscriminate gunfire killing four on the spot and seriously injuring another", the spokesman told AFP.

He said the 20-odd militants escaped with two rifles belonging to the dead soldiers after firing on the men from atop a hillock.

ME talks hit feverish pace ahead of Clinton's departure

THURMONT, Maryland, July 18 : Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians go around the clock in a feverish bid to reach a peace agreement before US President Bill Clinton leaves for a G8 summit in Japan, reports AFP.

According to the White House, Clinton was working harder than ever with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat before he leaves for Japan Wednesday.

"The pace and the intensity have both quickened," spokesman Joe Lockhart said Monday. "There have been two straight very long nights between the sides working through the difficult issues here."

"There are a number of negotiators who have been awake for a long time over the last two or three days," he added.

White House spokesman PJ Crowley said late Monday that the two sides "probably (will) work well into the night."

Lockhart said earlier at the summit press center nearby Camp David that "the plan is to complete this process before the president goes. The president has a schedule to keep."

Clinton is set to hold bilateral meetings with his Russian counterpart as well as the British and Japanese prime ministers in Okinawa, the spokesman noted. "I expect that when the president leaves the parties will wrap up their business," Lockhart added.

However, he refused to comment on reports that the talks were in crisis, citing a news blackout imposed on the summit.

"Time is very short, the gaps remain wide," Israeli cabinet secretary Yitzhak Herzog, who is in the United States, told AFP. "The next 48 hours are critical," he said.

"The last moments of the negotiations can be the decisive ones, pressure is mounting,

anything could happen," added Yuli Tamir, Israel's Minister of Immigration and Absorption.

A senior Palestinian source admitted too that the sides were now at loggerheads.

But Clinton reported "some progress" Sunday. "I'm more optimistic than I was when they got here," he said in a New York Daily News interview.

The White House stuck to that assessment late Monday. "The assessment made by the president yesterday is still valid," Crowley said.

In Jerusalem Monday, Israeli Parliament speaker Avraham Burg virtually ruled out any chance of a deal before Wednesday, saying the talks need "more time."

Burg told public radio after a long telephone conversation with Barak that the two sides have "never been so far apart" on the two most central issues in the negotiations: the status of Jerusalem and the question of the

Palestinian refugees.

The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, one of three factions in the Palestine Liberation Organisation, also urged Arafat to leave, saying the US-brokered talks were biased toward Israel.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Palestinians held peaceful marches in Gaza to support their negotiators.

Arafat has determined that he will declare a Palestinian state by September 13, come what may. Israel has countered that it can annex territory amid fears of violence.

Israel insists Jerusalem must remain its undivided capital, while the Palestinians want east Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the June 1967 war, as the capital of their own state.

Meanwhile, negotiations on civilian issues linked to a permanent peace settlement at a site near Camp David were "serious and intensive,"



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah shake hands prior to their talks on the troubled state's demands for more autonomy, in the PM's residence in New Delhi on Monday. —AFP photo

Suharto must appear in person at graft trial

JAKARTA, July 18 : Indonesia's government will insist that former President Suharto personally attend his corruption trial when it opens, possibly as early as next month, reports said today, says AFP.

"If Suharto cannot attend the trial because of illness or other factors, then the trial will have to be delayed until he can appear in court," The Jakarta Post quoted Attorney General Marzuki Darusman as saying.

Lawyers for the 79-year-old former strongman say he is suffering permanent brain damage and is unfit to stand trial.

Darusman, who has pledged to file the charges against Suharto in court before August 10, was speaking to reporters on Monday after a staff meeting on the Suharto case, the Post said.

"We will make an announcement next week on the district court selected to try the case, and the name of the prosecutor to handle the case," Darusman said.



US First Lady and US Senate candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton (L) poses with tourist Elaine Estervig of Madison, Wisconsin (R) on Ellis Island on Monday in New York. Clinton announced a \$870,000 donation to preserve deteriorating buildings on the historic island. —AFP photo

Anwar's marathon sex trial ends, verdict on Aug 4

KUALA LUMPUR, July 18 : The sex trial of ex-deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim — one of the longest in Malaysia's legal history — ended today after 13 months and the judge said he hoped to deliver his verdict on August 4, reports AFP.

High Court Justice Arifin Jaka said the date for his written judgement in the sodomy trial was tentative and told lawyers: "In case it is not ready, we will notify you."

Anwar, who sidelined his lawyers and dramatically took over the defence Monday, urged Arifin to be "guided by the law and the dictates of conscience."

The judge told him: "I am not easily swayed. You can rest assured that I will be guided by my conscience and judge the case based on evidence."

Anwar told reporters before

being taken back to jail: "My team, the counsels, did their best. Based on the evidence, the alibi, they (prosecution) have no case."

His lead counsel Christopher Fernando said the defence expected an acquittal as the prosecution case was "like a sieve, riddled with holes."

"The whole nation, the whole world will be shocked if he is convicted based on this kind and quality of evidence. It will go against all entrenched fundamental principles," Fernando told reporters.

Anwar, 52, and his adopted brother Sukma Darmawan, 39, deny sodomising Azizan, Abu Bakar, then a driver for Anwar's family, on one night between January and March 1993 in Sukma's apartment in a Kuala Lumpur suburb.

The offence is punishable by up to 20 years' jail plus a caning for men aged under 50.

Anwar, sacked by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in September 1998, is already serving a six-year jail term imposed in April 1999 for abusing his powers to cover up allegations of sexual misconduct.

He says he was framed because he intended to expose corruption and was seen as a political threat to Mahathir. The government denies any plot.

Winding up the defence earlier, Anwar repeated allegations that Mahathir organised a conspiracy that led to his sacking and jailing.

"Top police personnel and the attorney-general were acting under the instructions of the prime minister," he said.

Lankan troops claim killing of 943 Tigers

COLOMBO, July 18 : Sri Lankan security forces killed some 943 Tamil Tiger rebels between April and the middle of this month, the government said in a statement today, reports AFP.

The 943 separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed in fighting concentrated mainly in the northern peninsula of Jaffna, the government's Special Media Information Centre (SMIC) said.

It said the figures were obtained by monitoring radio communications between LTTE units.

The fatalities included 13 self-styled lieutenant colonels, 59 majors, 63 captains, 68 lieutenants and 70 second lieutenants, the SMIC said, adding that most of those killed were Tigers from the eastern Batticaloa region.

"The LTTE has been com-

pelled to enlist elderly civilians for military training and subsequent deployment," the SMIC said. "Fifty-three of such persons have also been killed during recent confrontations with security forces in Jaffna."

The government statement did not say how many government soldiers were killed during the corresponding period and there was no immediate reaction from the Tamil Tigers to the SMIC's claims.

Tiger rebels mounted a ferocious offensive in April aimed at capturing the northern peninsula of Jaffna.

But in late May the government announced it had been able to stop the "rolling offensive" with the introduction of new weapons and thousands of troop reinforcements.

Chinese flood death toll rises to 550

BEIJING, July 18 : China said today six more people had died in summer flooding which has so far claimed around 550 lives, double the death toll at the same time last year, reports AFP.

The six deaths, along with 48 missing, were reported from southwestern Sichuan province's Baiyu county, which experienced the worst floods in a century, according to Xinhua news agency.

The total number of people killed so far in this year's summer floods is about 550, more than twice the number in the same period in 1999, and the peak flood season in late July is still to come.

In mid-July last year, the government said 240 had been killed in floods, and the death toll eventually reached 800 for the entire 1999 flood season.

Speight threatens violence after being sidelined

New president sworn in

SUVA, July 18 : Fiji coup leader George Speight today raised the spectre of fresh turmoil in the Pacific nation after he was sidelined from a new government appointed to end two months of political and racial unrest, reports AFP.

The new administration contained one active supporter of Speight's May 19 coup against the country's first ethnic Indian prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and a number of others sympathetic to his ultra-nationalist agenda.

But it also contains one minister from the large Indian minority and is headed by Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, whom Speight had bitterly opposed when he was appointed interim premier by the military earlier this month.

Within hours of the new government being announced, Speight attacked its composition as a betrayal of what the coup was supposed to achieve — the exclusion of Indians from power.

— and an attempt to sideline him.

"They are treading on some dangerous ground," he warned. "It will result in a backlash."

"I think some of the people are trying to do me in and they are going to meet with some very strong resistance."

The extent of Speight's ability to mount a serious challenge to the new administration was unclear.

But the potential for further unrest was underlined by reports that 100 Indian families had been ethnically cleansed from an area north of Suva where Speight has strong support.

The Fiji Times said Indians in the Dawasamu area of Talevu — Speight's stronghold — had their properties torched, cars stolen, cattle slaughtered and had been robbed.

Rajen Prasad was quoted as saying his 11 family members were left only with the clothes they were wearing. "We have to

run away to save our lives," he said. "My four bedroom house had everything inside, but now it's gone."

The crisis triggered by Speight's coup has left Fiji facing international isolation and economic ruin.

Australia on Tuesday followed New Zealand's lead by slashing its aid to its Pacific neighbour and curtailing military cooperation. Both countries decided against economic sanctions on the grounds that would only aggravate the country's severe economic crisis and punish the innocent.

The government announced Tuesday would have included more Indians but a number of candidates withdrew out of concern for their own safety.

President Josefa Iloilo ruled out the reinstatement of Chaudhry but said he had named a team to reflect Fiji's multi-ethnic make-up.

The 20 ministers and 12 assistant ministers, to be sworn

in Wednesday are to prepare for elections in two years.

"As Head of State and as the symbol of national unity in Fiji, I cannot appoint a cabinet that is expressly committed to excluding a particular community that represents 43 per cent of Fiji's total population and which contributes the bulk of the revenue government needs to provide and to maintain essential services to all its citizens," Iloilo said.

Earlier Fiji's new president, Josefa Iloilo, was sworn in this morning as hostage taker George Speight looked on as a special guest at the ceremony.

Iloilo, 79, vice president under the abrogated 1997 Constitution, was Speight's nominee for the presidency after the previous office holder, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, was removed on the insistence of the rebels in the midst of the island's coup crisis.



Fiji's new president, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, signs a document as he is sworn in at Borron House in Suva yesterday. The new civilian government takes over from the interim military government which controlled Fiji during most of the coup crisis. —AFP photo

Japan, N Korean FM's to meet this month

TOKYO, July 18 : Japan and North Korea's foreign ministers will hold an historic, first-ever meeting this month in Bangkok as the long-standing foes struggle to establish diplomatic ties, reports AFP.

The encounter between Foreign Minister Yohel Kono and North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam-Sun on July 26 will be the highest-ranking meeting yet between the two sides.

They are to meet for about 20 minutes on the eve of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum in the Thai capital, Kono told a news conference.

Japan and North Korea separately agreed to try to resume stalled talks on normalising diplomatic ties as early as possible, a foreign ministry official said.

Celebrations for royal centenarian

LONDON, July 18 : Celebrations for the Queen Mother's centenary reach a crescendo on Wednesday with a royal parade of pomp and pageantry that is being billed as the biggest 100th birthday party ever staged, reports AFP.

A Spitfire flypast, a 25-foot (7-metre) birthday cake and a rare, if brief, public speech by the grand dame of the British royal family herself are the highlights of the 90-minute spectacular that anticipates Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother's 100th birthday on August 4.

A guest list of more than 12,000 people, including 20 members of her own family, will look on as some 7,000 uniformed soldiers and costumed civilians file past a dais on which the royal matriarch will hold court, dom — will join the parade, according to the event's organisers.

BRIEFLY

Rockets slam into centre of Quetta: Rockets slammed into the centre of the Baluchistan provincial capital of Quetta early Tuesday Ean attack apparently by disgruntled tribesmen, said police officials, AP reports from Quetta. There were no injuries and the damage was slight, they said. While no one took responsibility for the attack, police fear it may have been a retaliatory assault by members of the Mari tribe.

UN court awaits arrest of Karadzic: The UN War Crimes Tribunal expects Bosnian Serb war crimes suspects Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic to be arrested soon, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Carla Del Ponte, said, AFP reports from Rome. "I expect the arrest of Karadzic and general Mladic within the next few months, weeks, or with a little bit of luck even tonight," the daily newspaper La Stampa today cited her as saying.

Pupil gets 25-yr for killing teacher: A South African court has sentenced a school pupil to 25 years in prison for shooting a teacher dead over a sticker on a schoolbag, the Sowetan newspaper reported. Tuesday, AFP says from Johannesburg.

The pupil, Justice Mahafha, 19, confronted history and biblical studies teacher Andreas Werth as he was marking papers, drew a gun, and shot him without saying a word in front of a class of students at Townsview High School on the West Rand, the court was told.

Two Pakistanis executed in KSA: Two Pakistanis, a man and a woman, found guilty of drug trafficking in Saudi Arabia were executed by the sword on Tuesday, the interior ministry said, AFP reports from Riyadh.

Ijaz Ali Ibrahim and Mukhtiar Khadem Hussein were decapitated in the Red Sea city of Jeddah "for having tried to smuggle a quantity of heroin into the kingdom," the ministry said in a statement carried by the official SPA news agency.

Mild quake rocks Afghanistan: A mild earthquake rocked the Afghan capital Kabul and some other provinces early Tuesday, but no casualties or damage were reported, AFP says from Kabul.

The relatively lengthy jolts woke up Kabul residents around 03:30 local time (5:00 BST) when the local mullahs were making the call for dawn prayers, witnesses said.

Jet crash fuels demand for Indian aviation overhaul

NEW DELHI, July 18 : Indian aviation officials and its state-run carriers came under sharp attack for negligence today, a day after an ageing Boeing 737-200 crashed in the eastern state of Bihar killing 55 people, reports AFP.

Experts and the media unequivocally denounced the country's poor air safety standards and the under-par services offered by the international and domestic carriers, Air India and Indian Airlines, and said both were ripe for a complete overhaul.

On Monday, a 20-year-old Boeing operated by Alliance Air — a wholly owned subsidiary of Indian Airlines — slammed into a residential area just short of the airport in the eastern city of Patna.

Fifty-one of the 58 passengers and crew lost their lives as well as four people on the ground. The cause of the crash has yet to

be ascertained.

Russi Mody, who once headed Air India, said the tragedy underlined the urgent need to streamline operations.

"Both Indian Airlines and Air India should have updated their fleets a long time ago. They said the problem was money. You can't run an airline like this. You have to find the money," Mody told AFP.

"The public sector needs a complete overhaul. The first thing to do would be to merge Air India and Indian Airlines, as amalgamation would cut down on a great deal of duplication and give you money to buy new planes."

Air India has an ageing fleet of 26 Airbus and Boeing planes. Its ratio of employees to aircraft is about 770:1 — compared to the global average of about 250:1 — making wages one of its worst headaches.

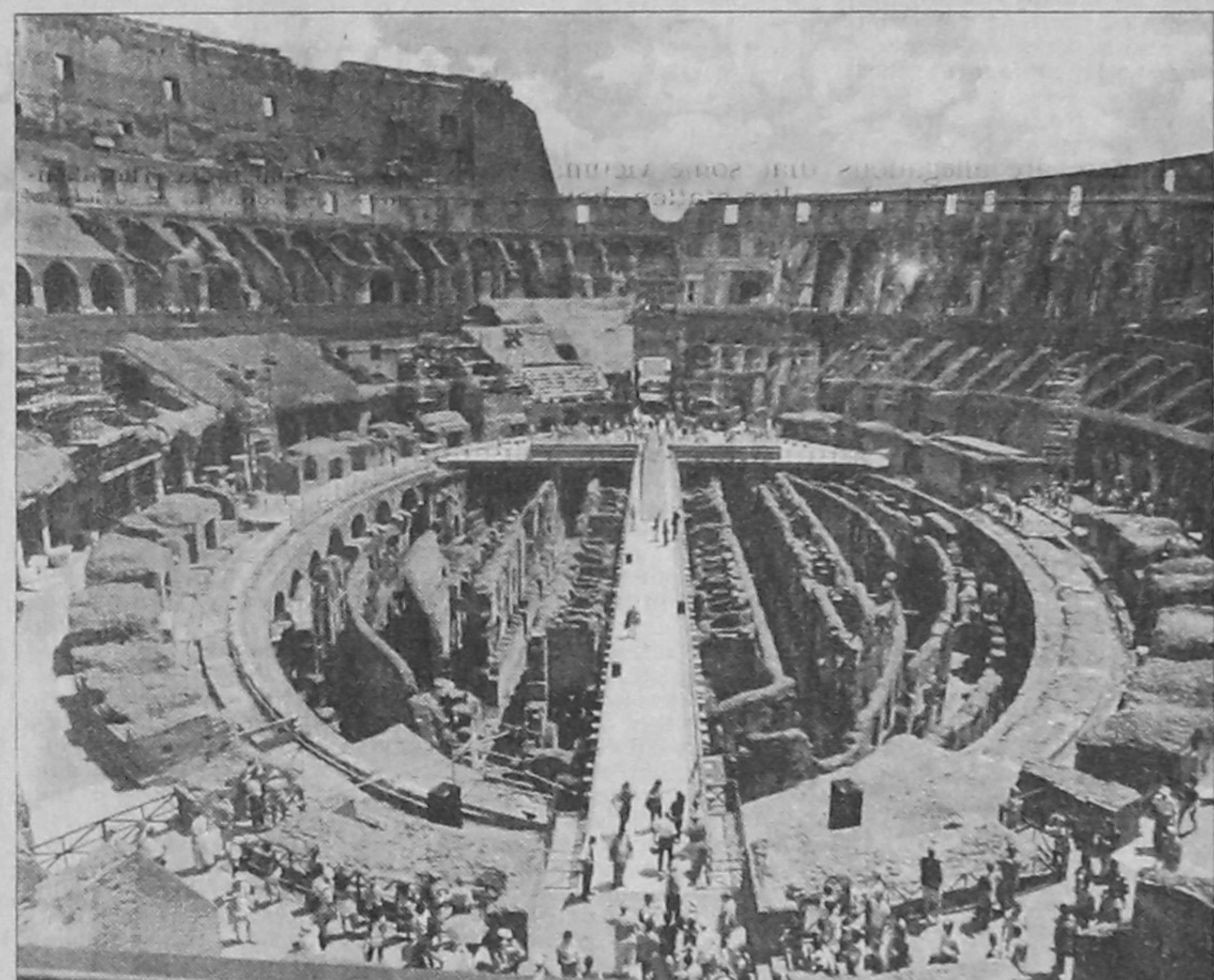
Anti-US protests set to overshadow G8 summit

OKINAWA ISLAND, Japan, July 18 : Protests against US bases in Japan's Okinawa Island, whipped up by a US marine's alleged sex crime, are set to buffet a Group of Eight leaders' summit this week, reports AFP.

The demonstrations begin shortly after US President Bill Clinton steps off a plane in Tokyo on Thursday for a summit with Japanese Prime Minister

Yoshiro Mori. And they will heat up when he participates in the three-day G8 summit starting Friday on the southern island of Okinawa, bristling with resentment over the American bases here.

Anti-globalization protests, that wrecked the World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle last December, are likely to be shoved into the background by the anti-American feeling.



A general view of the Colosseum in Rome where preparations are underway for the performance of King Oedipus that will have its premiere today, directed by Vassilis Papassileiou and played by actors of the National Greek Theatre of Athens. —AFP photo

China, Russia urge US to abandon missile shields

BEIJING, July 18 : Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin today issued a statement after nearly three hours of talks in Beijing urging Washington to abandon its National Missile Defence (NMD) and Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) projects, reports AFP.

Jiang and Putin also pledged to boost Sino-Russian strategic cooperation and trade — they signed three trade agreements including one for Russia to build an experimental nuclear reactor using fast neutron technology.

A joint statement appealed to the international community to take "all necessary measures" to oppose the NMD which it said could upset the strategic balance of the post-Cold War world.

The American plan is a source of enormous concern. Russia and China believe the

aim of this plan is to achieve unilateral superiority in military and security matters," said the statement.

The proposed NMD, if successfully developed, will be capable of shooting down incoming nuclear missiles and will give the United States a fundamental advantage over other nuclear powers.

However Washington insists the shield will not target either Russia or China, but is instead aimed at Iran, said the text.

China and Russia have adamantly opposed the shields for the past two years even though they are still in the design stage. Although no firm decision has been taken, US Defense Secretary William Cohen said in Beijing last week that Washington was pushing ahead with the projects.

Putin arrived in Beijing late

Monday and was given a full ceremonial welcome with a 21-gun salute in Tiananmen Square designed to counter the threat of rogue states such as North Korea and Iran.

The TMD system is designed to protect Japan and Washington's other Asian allies from North Korean missiles, but Beijing is furious at plans to extend the shield to Taiwan which it considers a rebel province.

"To involve Taiwan is any form of anti-missile defence put in place by a foreign country is unacceptable and could gravely endanger the stability of the region," said the statement.

The statement also strongly rejected Washington's plan to amend the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, a step seen

Arson, gunfire rage in Ambon

JAKARTA, July 18 : Three people were killed and more than 10 injured as mortars and gunfire reverberated through Indonesia's battle-torn city of Ambon for the fourth straight day today, residents said.

Six Christians were injured in the mortar attacks launched by Muslims near the provincial military command in downtown Ambon. Max Sihaya of the Maranatha emergency support post, told AFP.

"Homes were burned down, people are fleeing to seek refuge. There's nothing left here," Sihaya said.

Malik Selang, the secretary of the Ambon chapter of the Muslim Indonesian Council of Ulemas (MUI), said three Muslims were killed by snipers roaming rooftops in the city.

But he denied Muslims attacked Christians with mortars.

"On the contrary, Christian snipers are shooting Muslims from the top of the Pusdikom (Computer Education Center) building," Selang told AFP by telephone.

Earlier, Johanna Hukom, deputy chairman of the Maluku chapter of the Indonesian Red Cross, said Muslim mobs, reportedly aided by the army, were burning Christian homes in the areas of Airmatia Cina, Pongoro Atas and Urteseng.