

Abu Syyaf frees German newsmen
JOLO, Philippines, July 27 : Muslim extremists today freed German journalist Andreas Lorenz, one of dozens of hostages they are holding in the southern Philippine island of Jolo, reports AFP.

The 48 year-old Der Spiegel magazine reporter was fetched from the Abu Syyaf jungle hide-out by an emissary of provincial governor Abdusakar Tan and later boarded a chartered plane at Jolo airport for the southern city of Zamboanga.

10 killed in West Bengal
NEW DELHI, July 27 : At least 10 people were killed today in a clash between two groups in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, domestic news agencies reported, says AFP.

According to the Press Trust of India (PTI), the clash in the state's Birbhun district was triggered by a dispute over rice harvesting. PTI said 10 people were killed and senior police officials had been sent to the spot to prevent any further violence.

The United News of India said 11 people had been killed and that the violence was between supporters of rival regional political groups.

Fiji faces civil war as military crackdown sparks backlash

Rebels kidnap 2 NZ pilots

SUVA, July 27 : Fiji's military today arrested hundreds of supporters of coup leader George Speight, sparking an immediate backlash that raised fears the country could be on the brink of civil war, reports AFP. Within hours of the arrests, nationalist rebels in the northern town of Labasa had retaliated by seizing around 50 members of the country's large ethnic Indian minority and taking them hostage in the town's barracks, which has been in rebel hands for several weeks.

The military, which arrested Speight late on Wednesday, raided a school where his supporters have been camped for the last week just after dawn. One person was killed in the operation, another 40 injured and 369 people arrested, army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Filippo Tarakinkini said. He said the dead man, who was 50, had died from suffocation from the effects of tear-gas used in the raid. None of the injured had been shot.

Following the raid, the military also seized Ilisoni Ligari, a former member of Britain's Special Air Service (SAS), and 12 special forces troops. Ligari is Speight's main military ally and orchestrated the rebels' seizure of parliament in May. The military spokesman said Speight and his co-conspirators would be held indefinitely in the guard house at military headquarters, the Queen Elizabeth Barracks. Speight could face a charge of treason following a threat on the life of President Josefa Iloilo Wednesday, he added. Treason carries the death penalty in Fiji. A government nominated last week by Iloilo, however, contained only a handful of Speight allies and was rejected by the rebels, prolonging a crisis which has left Fiji facing economic ruin and international isolation.

The seizure of the Indians was one of a series of incidents across the country in the aftermath of the military crackdown. Phil Goff, the foreign minister of neighbouring New Zealand, urged the military to quickly bring the situation under control, warning the alternative was civil war. "The cause for concern is that if authority is not asserted by the military quickly there could be widespread conflict." "If a civil war broke out and there were divisions in the military ranks and the military armories were broken into, then you're looking at the possibility of widespread deaths." Australia warned its citizens to leave Fiji immediately. Tarakinkini said the military was taking steps to disarm potential troublemakers. "We intend to get every single weapon off the streets," he said. Iloilo was expected to name a new government on Friday and have it sworn in immediately afterwards. The government is to be headed by Laisenia Qarase, a banker who is close to the military. Qarase said Thursday it would not take three years to prepare for fresh elections, a year longer than envisaged when martial law was lifted after the hostages were released on July 13. He also made it clear that the new administration intended to implement the kind of reforms demanded by Speight and his gang.

In a speech in which he lashed out at Australia and New Zealand's "aggressive and threatening" stance on the crisis, he said his government would introduce measures favouring indigenous Fijians. Meanwhile, two aeroplane pilots from New Zealand were seized by rebels loyal to the leader of Fiji's attempted coup today and were being held at a remote Fijian village, a woman who saw them said. The Air Fiji pilots had landed at Savusavu airport on the southern coast of the northern island of Vanua Levu when three men abducted them at gunpoint from the aircraft.



The Indian Army displays arms captured from Pakistani soldiers in last year's two-month Kargil conflict with Pakistani troops in disputed Kashmir state at New Delhi's India Gate war memorial during the first anniversary of the Kargil "Victory Day" celebration yesterday. The battle left over 1,000 soldiers dead on both sides.

India warns Pakistan on Kargil 'victory day'

NEW DELHI, July 27 : India on Wednesday paid tributes to the troops who died in last year's conflict in disputed Kashmir's Kargil sector, with a warning to Pakistan against any further attempt at military adventurism, reports AFP. Indian President K.R. Narayanan presided over a wreath-laying ceremony at the India Gate memorial in New Delhi, attended by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Defence Minister George Fernandes and the chiefs of the three armed forces.

Vajpayee and Indian army chief V.P. Malik lit candles at the British-built India Gate war memorial in New Delhi as hundreds of children ringed the red-stone building with candles in their hands. Reports said many homes across the country of one billion people put out earthen lamps or lit candles as a token of respect to the soldiers killed in the 10-week fighting in Kashmir's icy heights of Kargil.

The ceremonies marked the first anniversary of "Victory Day" - set apart by the government to commemorate India's successful military campaign to push back an incursion by Pakistan-backed forces over the disputed Kashmir border. Defence minister Fernandes also inaugurated an exhibition of weapons captured during the conflict, as well as those used by the Indian armed forces. "Though there is joy in the victory over Pakistan, the day is being observed to remember the supreme sacrifices by our valiant soldiers and officers," he said. "This is also to remind our enemy what consequences await them if they dare such misadventures again."

"We want to send a message that our armed forces will go to any length to defend the country," he said. The mass incursion over the Line of Control (LoC) dividing Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir caught India unawares and triggered a vicious battle - fought mainly in severe, high altitude conditions - that claimed more than 1,000 lives on both sides.

The conflict caused grave concern within the international community, coming as it did one year after India and Pakistan conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests. It also blew apart the nascent Indo-Pakistan peace process launched by Prime Minister Vajpayee when he made a landmark visit to Lahore in February, 1999. "Although the final 'victory' lay with India, Kargil exposed gaping holes in its military defences - especially in the surveillance and intelligence sectors - and prompted a lengthy, and sometimes very critical, post-mortem. Nevertheless, army chief General Malik dismissed suggestions that the whole concept of 'Victory Day' might strike a wrong chord."

BRIEFLY

Canada recognises DPRK: Canada has little confidence in North Korea's diplomatic about-face this year, even though it has just formally recognised the Stalinist nation. Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said Thursday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

Enkhbayar new Mongolian PM: Nambarin Enkhbayar, the leader of Mongolia's former communist party which won a landslide victory in this month's parliamentary polls, has been appointed prime minister, AFP reports from Ulan Bator.

Bus driver, commuter killed in SA: A bus driver and a commuter were killed early Thursday when gunmen opened fire on a bus in Cape Town in the latest of a series of attacks which have already claimed five other lives, police said, AFP reports from Cape Town.

Congo to destroy landmine: The Congolese army has decided to destroy its stocks of anti-personnel mines, a military source here said Wednesday, AFP reports from Brazzaville.

Operations to dispose of the mines are already underway in the country's seven military zones, according to the source. Last week the provisional legislature ratified the UN convention banning the export and use of anti-personnel mines.

Investigators homing in on cause of Concorde crash

PARIS, July 27 : Crash investigators were hoping that the examination of the Air France Concorde's black boxes and video footage of its last moments would give them a clearer picture today of what caused the plane to plunge to the ground on Tuesday, killing 113 people, reports AFP. Detailed analysis of the two on-board flight recorders - both recovered intact from the wreckage north of Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport - was expected to confirm the theory of a fire in the inside port engine as the aircraft was taking off.

Air accident experts were also examining an amateur video taken by a passing motorist which shows the Concorde just after take-off spewing a trail of fire and black smoke tens of metres long. On Wednesday, Air France confirmed that the inside port engine -- engine number two -- had been repaired by maintenance men before the plane left, causing a delay to passengers of just over an hour. The crew of the Concorde had detected a problem with the thrust-reverser -- the part of a jet engine used to slow an aeroplane down on landing or abort a take-off -- and the captain requested a replacement part. The routine job took half an hour, and investigators were questioning the two men who carried it out.

But officials warned against speculation and said there was no evidence yet linking the repair to the fire that burst into seconds after the Concorde started moving down the runway. "Let the investigators do their work," said Pierre Graf, France's director of civil aviation. Experts were quoted in Thursday's French press casting doubt on the theory that a problem in the thrust-reverser caused the fire, and said it was more likely a foreign object had become embedded in the engine, rupturing fuel leads.

Arafat vows to declare state

RIYADH, July 27 : Yasser Arafat vowed in an interview printed today to go ahead with a declaration of a Palestinian state by September 13 even as he prepares for new peace talks in the aftermath of Camp David, reports AFP. "Yes, yes the declaration of a Palestinian state still stands, and at this time, with minor adjustments... i.e. the declaration of the state begins to take shape from Sept. 13 and will take full embodiment on the ground," the Palestinian leader told the Saudi Gazette newspaper.

"We are again ready to enter into talks, but on the basis of the Palestinian principles and that of land for peace," he said. Arafat said Tuesday's collapse of the Camp David summit with Israel was a "triumph of the will of the Palestinian people ... and deep-rooted principles." "This solid stand made us strong despite the failure," he said adding that the Palestinians had come under "great pressure". He went on to put the blame squarely on the shoulders of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

"Let me clarify to you and the Saudi and Arab people that I don't bear the responsibility for the failure of the Camp David summit because the Palestinians have fundamental principles which they can't relinquish," Arafat said.

China, Russia & India take aim at US missile defence

BANGKOK, July 27 : China, Russia and India took aim at the United States at an Asian security forum here today, saying its missile defence program and "Cold War mentality" threatened regional stability, reports AFP. Foreign ministers from the three nuclear states singled out the US Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) program for stinging attacks ahead of the arrival at the Bangkok talk of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. "A Cold War mentality is still affecting the way some countries perceive world politics and international relations," Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said in a speech at the opening session of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

"Some people are hawking the Theatre Missile Defence program against the tide of our times," he said, referring to the American ballistic defence system planned for northeast Asia. "Such developments are compromising regional confidence building and aggravating the instability of regional security." His Russian counterpart Igor Ivanov fired a broadside of his own, saying US moves to develop and deploy the regional anti-missile shield and a similar national system risked sparking a new global arms race. "The US plan to develop the National Missile Defence is a matter of deep concern," he told delegates from 22 nations and the European Union, adding the TMD was equally worrying. "As a result, further strategic offensive arms reduction would become impossible and the entire system of arms reduction and limitation agreements would be revised (and) would inevitably lead to a new arms race."

Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh also expressed his country's opposition, delegation spokesman Raminder Jassal told reporters. "I am a bit disappointed in the statements from the Commonwealth, from (British Foreign Secretary) Mr Robin Cook, against what happened on October 12," he said. "We have been in the Commonwealth. We would like to be in the Commonwealth." The Commonwealth barred Pakistan from taking part in its councils in response to the military coup.

Musharraf hits out at UK "We are extremely disappointed with the British government not to assist us, a poor country, which has been plundered," Musharraf was quoted as saying by The Times. "We have got no information whatsoever from Britain." Musharraf also said that statements from Britain and the Commonwealth condemning his October 12 coup which ousted Sharif were "unfair", and stressed that he wanted Pakistan to remain in the 54-nation grouping.



(L-R) Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar, Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan and US Assistant Secretary of State Strobe Talbott attend the 7th ASEAN Regional Forum in Bangkok. Foreign ministers of Asia's top security forum, with North Korea making its debut appearance, met yesterday to discuss the political crisis in Fiji, missile defence, Indonesia's woes and the regional drug scourge.

Advertisement for the 7th ASEAN Regional Forum in Bangkok, Thailand, July 27, 2000. It mentions the presence of various foreign ministers and the forum's focus on regional security and cooperation.

Advertisement for Biman Bangladesh Airlines. It features the airline's logo and contact information for its Stores & Purchase Directorate. The ad includes details about an international re-tender for Biman Bangladesh Airlines, listing items like plastic and metal containers, their quantities, and costs.

Advertisement for 'Daka Sita Karpareshon' (Daka Sita Clearance) by Prakash Bhabha. It details the terms of a tender for the supply of various materials and services. The ad includes a table with columns for item number, description, quantity, cost, and schedule. It also provides contact information for the tendering process.