

## World war crimes court opens amid US challenge

AFP, Hague

The world's first permanent war crimes tribunal officially opened its doors in The Hague yesterday to bring to justice perpetrators of the worst crimes against humanity as the United States stepped up its opposition to the court.

An advance team reported to work at a temporary office of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the outskirts of Dutch capital and was ready to receive the first complaints, Dutch foreign ministry spokesman Frank de Bruin told AFP.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called the creation of the ICC, supported now by 74 states, "an historic occasion."

"It holds the promise of a world in which the perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are prosecuted when individual states are unable or unwilling to bring them to justice," Annan said in New York on Sunday.

But the United States along with China, Russia, India and Israel oppose the court, arguing that its citizens could be the target of politically-motivated prosecutions.

Stepping up its challenge to the ICC, the United States vetoed the renewal of a UN force in Bosnia on the eve of the court's launch, to protest

the UN Security Council's refusal to exempt peacekeepers from ICC prosecution.

The US veto, its 75th since the United Nations was set up in 1945, was the latest move in a clash of wills between the United States and advocates of the ICC -- most of them the world's leading democracies.

Cast only seven hours before the court came into being, the veto could lead to the collapse of the UN police force in Bosnia and also call into doubt the 19,000-strong, NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia, known as SFOR.

At NATO headquarters in Brussels, talks were to get under way to try to resolve the dispute over the future of the Bosnia force before the Wednesday midnight deadline.

Disagreement over the court has prompted Dutch and ICC authorities to take a low-key approach to the launch of the court.

While human rights groups, the United Nations and many governments have hailed the court as a milestone in international justice, there was no official ceremony to mark its coming into being.

Edmond Wellenstein, the Dutch director general of the ICC advance team at the new court said the ICC was "a symbol of hope".



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (C) addresses the Security Council at the United Nations headquarters on Sunday. The UN Security Council voted unanimously to extend the United Nations police mission in Bosnia for 72 hours after the United States vetoed a full renewal.



### Naidu new BJP chief

AFP, New Delhi

India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) yesterday formally appointed Venkaiah Naidu as its new chief, replacing the previous party president Jana Krishna Murthy, officials said.

Krishnamurthy, 72, resigned from his post Saturday to pave the way for his replacement by Naidu, 53, whom the Indian media has described as a loyalist of Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani.

Advani was appointed deputy prime minister over the weekend ahead of a cabinet reshuffle scheduled for yesterday.

Analysts say the appointments are aimed at revamping the BJP party, which has suffered a string of losses in state elections over the past year.

Advani, Human Resources Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi and several other top BJP party officials were present at Monday's ceremony.

Political experts say the changes in BJP signified the end of the party's liberal image and a return to its original Hindu nationalist roots.

### Grenades hit airfield in Afghanistan

AP, Bagram, Afghanistan

Two rocket-propelled grenades were fired at an airfield in southern Afghanistan used by US special forces troops, a military spokesman said yesterday. No injuries were reported.

Col. Roger King said it was not known who fired the grenades late Sunday, which exploded within the grounds of the airfield near the southern city of Kandahar. He declined to say how close the explosions were to U.S. forces, though he said no equipment was damaged.

U.S. forces did not return fire because they could not determine which direction the grenades came from, King said. Special forces troops were searching for the source of the attack.

"It was enough of a concern that we wanted to go out and find out who was shooting at us," King told reporters at Bagram air base near Kabul, the capital, which is the headquarters of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. "But it's not like somebody penetrated our perimeter."

He said the rocket-propelled grenades have a range of about 300 yards.

King also said there had been "sporadic gunfire" near the base during the weekend. He did not elaborate, and it was not clear if the firing was directed at the base. Many Afghans keep weapons, mostly automatic rifles, in their homes for security reasons.

### First test-tube baby in Lanka

AFP, Colombo

A team of Sri Lankan doctors Monday successfully delivered a test-tube baby -- the first time such a procedure has been carried out without help from overseas medical experts.

The baby girl was delivered Monday morning at a private hospital in the capital Colombo, doctors said.

"This was the first ever time that an all Sri Lankan team of doctors have performed a test-tube birth," said Harsha Seneviratne, who led the four member specialist team.

Seneviratne said there have already been several hundred test tube births in the country, but all of them were performed under the personal guidance of medical experts from abroad.

Dr Champa Wilson, from the Vindana Medical Centre in Colombo, who pioneered the procedure, said: "We have given hope to many childless Sri Lankan couples who were made to rely on facilities overseas in Malaysia, India, Singapore and Britain at a high cost."

Wilson said the process in Sri Lanka would cost around 300,000 rupees (3,100 dollars) which was much less than the cost overseas.

Atula Kaluarachchi and Sumedha Wijeratne, an embryologist scientist, who formed the rest of the team, said the rules on test-tube babies were laid down by the Sri Lanka Medical Council and unmarried couples would therefore not be allowed to have the procedure.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin waves goodbye after the ceremony where Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa was sworn-in for a second five year term on the fifth anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China yesterday. Tung and his 14 member cabinet were sworn-in in the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre where British Hong Kong was handed over to China at midnight on June 30, 1997.

## Hong Kong marks fifth year as part of China

AP, Hong Kong

As protesters lashed out at the "murderous regime" in Beijing, Chinese President Jiang Zemin marked Hong Kong's first five years back in China yesterday by saying its capitalist ways are intact but that citizens should better support the mainland.

Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa was sworn in to a second term early Monday, and minutes later Jiang urged the former British colony to "make conscious efforts to safeguard the security and unification of the motherland and endeavor to defend its overall interests."

Outside the anniversary ceremonies - and out of earshot of the dignitaries - demonstrators clamored for improved human rights in the mainland, an accounting for the 100th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution.

people from coming here to attend protests on Sunday and Monday.

Under cloudy morning skies, a Hong Kong police band solemnly hoisted the Chinese and Hong Kong flags Monday to mark Hong Kong's return from Britain to China on July 1, 1997.

The territory is now governed under an arrangement called "one country, two systems" that recog-

nizes Beijing's sovereignty but allows for considerable local autonomy and freedoms.

Tung began his second term with a pledge to fix the ailing economy. The former shipping tycoon noted that "worries are weighing on the hearts of Hong Kong people" as the territory tries

to bounce back from a slump that has pushed unemployment to a record 7.4 percent.

"We need not be pessimistic," Tung said. "All of us should realize that Hong Kong possesses the ability to overcome adversity."

Critics fear Hong Kong's freedoms are being eroded.

### UNSC extends Bosnia mission for 72 hours

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council voted unanimously Sunday to extend the United Nations police mission in Bosnia for 72 hours after the United States vetoed a full renewal.

The British ambassador to the UN, Jeremy Greenstock, said council members wanted "time for further discussion of this very difficult issue" surrounding US opposition to the new International Criminal Court.

Greenstock, who takes over the Security Council presidency Monday, told reporters that negotiations would resume "in capitals" -- in other words between foreign ministers.

He said he expected to call informal consultations of the council Tuesday "to see where we have got to."

Earlier, the US ambassador, John Negroponte, vetoed a six-month renewal of the 1,536-strong police-training mission, known as UNMIBH, after other council members rejected a US demand to make its members immune from arrest or prosecution by the ICC.

### Firefighter charged in Arizona fire

REUTERS, Phoenix

A 29-year-old contract firefighter who was charged on Sunday with setting one of the major Arizona wildfires, allegedly started the blaze because he wanted some seasonal work, prosecutors said.

Leonard Gregg, who works as a seasonal firecrew member for the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, allegedly set two fires, one of which grew into the huge Rodeo fire that merged with another blaze and charred an area larger than New York City.

At a hearing in U.S. District Court in Flagstaff, Gregg was charged with two counts of willfully and without authority setting fire to timber, said U.S. District Magistrate Stephen Verkamp.

Each count carries a potential five-year sentence and a fine of up to \$250,000. Verkamp set a preliminary hearing on July 3 for Gregg, who is being held without bail.

The U.S. Attorney's Office released more details about the suspect and their case at a news conference later on Sunday in Show Low, a town that firefighters saved last week.

### Bus crash kills 19 Polish tourists in Hungary

AFP, Budapest

Nineteen people were killed and 32 seriously injured yesterday when a bus packed with Polish tourists slid off a road and overturned near lake Balaton in western Hungary, emergency services told AFP.

"Everybody on the bus was either killed or injured," Pal Gyoerfi of the national ambulance service told AFP, adding: "it was perhaps the country's worst road crash in decades."

Two children, a boy and a girl of between eight and 10 years were among the dead and three other children were in hospital, two of them with serious injuries, said Gyoerfi.

One adult was in a critical condition while 17 others were seriously injured.

"We found 19 dead at the scene. The injured were immediately given first aid, including transfusions and pain killers," Gyoerfi said.

The top of the bus was "literally shaved off or ground away" after the vehicle overturned and the wreckage was still giving way when the 16 ambulance cars called to the scene arrived, he said.

## Hamas vows to avenge Israeli killing of bomb-maker

REUTERS, Nablus

The militant Islamic group Hamas has vowed to avenge Israel's killing of one of its top bomb-makers, threatening a new spasm of violence in a 21-month-old Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation.

Israeli special forces killed Muhanad al-Tajer and one of his deputies in a raid on a house in the West Bank city of Nablus on Sunday. Palestinians described Tajer as "the Engineer-4," the head of Hamas's military wing in Nablus and a bomb-maker at the top of Israel's most-wanted list.

"The assassination will increase Hamas's determination to continue Jihad and resistance," Ismail Haniyeh, a Hamas official in the

Gaza Strip, told Reuters. "Hamas will never forget the blood of its martyrs."

Israeli security sources said Tajer, 26, and his men were responsible for the deaths of more than 100 Israelis in suicide bombings, including an attack on a Jerusalem city bus that killed 19 people nearly two weeks ago.

The Israeli strike followed the removal of 11 Jewish settler outposts in the West Bank ordered by Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, who vowed to dismantle rogue settlements vulnerable to the Palestinian revolt.

Adding to the pressure on the Palestinians, Secretary of State Colin Powell said Washington was no longer talking to Yasser Arafat

and had no plans to do so in the future.

President Bush called in a speech last week for Arafat's replacement as Palestinian leader, saying his Authority was tainted by terrorism and corruption.

Arafat, speaking by satellite link to an audience in Switzerland, offered to meet Bush "any time, anywhere" to promote Middle East peace, despite the president's call for his removal.

Arafat, who has announced Palestinian elections for January, said it was impossible to carry out reforms demanded by the international community while Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory remained "complete and total."



A Relative of South Korean sailors killed during a gunbatttle in the Yellow sea last week cry during a memorial service at a military hospital in southern Seoul yesterday. The firefighter left four South Korean sailors dead, one missing and 19 injured.

### Thai PM arrives in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra arrived in the Pakistani capital yesterday for a two-day visit that will include talks with President Pervez Musharraf.

Thaksin's plane landed at around 12:25 local time at the Chaklala airforce base outside Islamabad, where he was greeted with a 19-gun salute and received by Pakistani Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz.

Thaksin and Musharraf will discuss bilateral matters and possible cooperation in rebuilding war-torn Afghanistan, Bangkok said last week.



Managing Director of Janata Bank Murshid Kuli Khan presenting a crest of the bank to Ambassador of Bangladesh in Italy Mohammad Ziauddin at the opening ceremony of Janata Exchange Company Sri in Rome recently.