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SUNDAY LEISURE  
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*The  
Sleeping  
Beauty of  
Chatuchak  
Park*

P.15

**A town  
without pity**

P.17



**King U-Thong  
& Sir Galahad**

P. 18

## KL ex-minister loses murder case appeal

KUALA LUMPUR

THE life of a former Cabinet minister now hangs on the slender hope of a king's pardon after the Federal Court's decision yesterday to dismiss his appeal against conviction for murder and death sentence.

The three-man panel of Malaysia's most senior judges found the facts pointed to "only one conclusion" — that Mokhtar Hashim, the 42-year-old ex-minister of culture, youth and sports, "fired the fatal shots that killed" his political foe Taha Talib, the former speaker of the Negri Sembilan State Legislative

Assembly. But the court set free Mokhtar's co-defendant, 54-year-old village headman Rahmat Satiman when it ruled his incriminating statement should not have been admitted since it was not voluntary.

The Federal Court said that after reviewing 75 days of evidence in Malaysia's longest criminal case, it concurred with the trial judge's findings and affirmed Mokhtar's conviction.

The panel of judges said even without Rahmat's statement, which specifically accused Mokhtar of planning

and executing Taha in a fight for political supremacy in his home state, there was still sufficient evidence to find him guilty.

The Federal Court accepted as "unshakeable" crucial evidence of a prosecution witness who had seen the former minister and four alleged collaborators — one of whom died awaiting trial and two others who were earlier acquitted — near the scene of the murder in the early hours of April 14, 1982.

It also found "after careful and considered scrutiny that Mokhtar was in custody, possession and control at relevant times" of the pistol used to assassinate the elderly politician, a week before the general elections.

The judges also expressed "cynicism" at the "clock-watching efficiency and immaculate recall" of witnesses called by Mokhtar to establish that he was home at the time of the murder.

"Witnesses are weighed not counted," the judges said, referring to key alibi evidence submitted by Mokhtar's bodyguard as a "pathetic case of misguided loyalty."

Mokhtar, his face an emotional blank, listened to the fatal decision, motionless.

As the judges rose, he turned to his wife, embraced her and kissed his elderly parents.

His mother, overcome with grief, fainted as she was led from the court by police and distraught family members.

The ex-minister's lawyer, Jagjit Singh who charged the trial judge with complicity, was told by the Federal Court his attacks were "ill-chosen, mischievous and contemptuous" and the defendant was not denied a fair trial.

He said an appeal to the king, invested with the power under the country's constitution to grant "pardons, re-

prieves and respites" for all offences, was "just a procedure."

Under Malaysia's penal code, death sentences are mandatory for murder and in Mokhtar's case, heard under special security regulations dispensing with a jury a preliminary inquiry, the king only has the authority to commute the death by hanging sentence to life imprisonment.

Mokhtar's headline-grabbing murder case caused considerable embarrassment to Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's Government, elected on a promise of cleaning up corruption. —UPI

Column  
Nine

**Hopping  
mad on  
campus**

THE law was called to a rabbit breeders' conference at Pennsylvania State University after organisers complained that some people were trying to disrupt the gathering. Police arrived to find six people wearing one-piece white cotton suits with pink and white ears hopping around the room. Despite complaints from the organisers, police said the six could stay — if they refrained from hopping. The protest was organised by a group called Trans-Species Unlimited which was concerned about plans to breed rabbits to make "bunny burgers" for fast-food fanciers.

**Grin and bear it**

CANADIAN Opposition leader Erik Nielsen's favourite dish is "Grilled Grizzly Bear Foot." It's one of 70 dishes featured in a new cookbook titled: "The House in the Kitchen: Canadian Parliamentary Cookbook." Nielsen's re-

## VN training Thai rebels in Laos



## US Navy rescues 262 boat people

SUNBATHERS and windsurfers of Pattaya's Jomtien beach got a surprise yesterday afternoon when 262 Vietnamese refugees came ashore after being picked up by a US Navy ship, the USS Sterett, on Wednesday.

The Vietnamese men, women and children, some wearing sailor hats and sporting wide smiles, drew a sizeable crowd of onlookers as they were taken on board buses to Phanat Nikhom refugee camp, Chon Buri.

According to Huynh Hau Cau, 42, a former Vietnamese navy commander, the refugees left Vietnam in two boatloads.

The first boat, which he piloted, left the Saigon River at midnight on July 14 with 173 on board.

The second boat set sail from Rach Gia Province on the west coast of southern Vietnam on July 18 with 89 refugees aboard.

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A US naval source said it was believed that a third boatload of 80 Vietnamese refugees was still out in the Gulf of Thailand.

The source said that if they could be found they would be picked up by outgoing US naval vessels and taken to the Philippines.

Cau, who speaks good English, said that before his boat was picked up by the USS Sterett his engine broke down on July 16 and later the hull cracked and the boat began taking on water.

He added that when the bilge pump malfunctioned the refugees had to bail out water with buckets.

Most of the people on his boat were residents of Ho Chi Minh City, Cua

said, adding that those on the second boat were Chinese-Vietnamese.

Cau claimed that he received training in San Diego, California in the early 1970's along with two Thai navy officers whom he said he would like to contact.

The officer said the refugees were given three meals a day while on board the Sterett.



Left: Crewmen of the USS Sterett lower a gangway to meet the Vietnamese refugees whom they found adrift in the Gulf of Thailand on Wednesday.

Above: Smoke billows from one of the boats as it drifts near the Sterett. It was scuttled to prevent it posing a hazard to shipping.

● More pictures, Page 3.



## In safe hands

*Above:* A US Navy officer tries, apparently unsuccessfully, to comfort a tearful Vietnamese child as he carries him to shore at Pattaya's Jomtien beach yesterday during a landing involving 262 boatpeople. The Vietnamese, rescued at sea last week by the USS Sterett which brought them to Pattaya, will be resettled in the United States.

*Left:* Refugee skipper Huu Han ... the ordeal is over.