

BRIEFLY

4 killed in Scottish train crash: At least four people were killed and up to 30 were feared injured after two passenger trains collided head-on late on Sunday in Scotland, police said, reports Reuter from London.

The crash happened at Newton station southeast of the city of Glasgow, a police spokesman said.

The local ambulance service said four people were killed when the trains, each with three coaches, collided.

Firemen were searching the wreckage for other victims, the ambulance spokesman said, and at least 17 injured, mostly "walking wounded", had been reported so far.

19 dead, 9 missing in S. Korea: Torrential rains triggered major flooding in South Korea on Sunday and state television said at least 19 people were dead and nine were missing, Reuter from Seoul reports.

Many low-lying areas were under water after up to 27 cm (9.5 inches) of rain fell in Seoul and surrounding countryside.

The state television said most victims were carried away by floods or buried by landslides.

The Yonhap news agency said three people were killed when they were struck by lightning.

Dalai Lama climbs sacred mountain: The Dalai Lama on Sunday climbed a Siberian mountain sacred to Buddhists and held a religious service there, the Soviet news agency Tass reported, AP says from Moscow.

The Buddhist leader ascended Mount Alkhanal, where a Buddhist prayer is said to show through the surface of the granite mountain, the news agency said.

The mountain is located 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Aginskoye in the Aginsky Buryat Autonomous District near the Mongolian border.

Kurds to control Iraqi city: Armed Kurdish rebels swarmed through the streets of this northern city Sunday, apparently in firm control after fighting with Iraqi soldiers last week reportedly left hundreds dead, reports AP from Suleimanyeh, Iraq.

Government officials claimed that a month-old agreement of cooperation between the Kurdish Pesh Murga guerrillas and Iraqi police was still in force and that there were joint security patrols in the city. But during a half-hour, government-guided tour Sunday, the only government forces seen in the city were the Iraqi soldiers who accompanied 20 foreign journalists.

Hundreds of guerrillas, wearing baggy trousers and black and white turbans and carrying machine-guns and rifles on their shoulders, milled in the streets and surrounded the office of the provincial governor, Mohammed Najim Naqishbandi. The atmosphere was calm, and there did not appear to be any fear that fighting was expected to start again. Residents and aid workers estimated 200 people were killed and 600 wounded in the fighting last week, and that at least 1,200 Iraqi soldiers had been captured.

PLO accepts Bush's proposals: The Palestine Liberation Organization on Sunday dropped its insistence on attending a Middle East peace conference, accepting US proposals for delegates to represent Palestinian interests, AP reports from Nicosia.

"We accept President Bush's proposals and the PLO is ready to form its delegation to the peace conference from Palestinians from the occupied territories and outside the occupied territories, a delegation that represents the Palestinians," said PLO official Bassam Abu Sharif.

"By doing so we are in fact accepting Mr. Baker's proposal," said Abu Sharif, adviser to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, in a telephone interview from PLO headquarters in Tunis, Tunisia.

US Secretary of State James A. Baker III. Baker flew from Jordan to Israel Sunday in an effort to arrange a peace conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the status of Palestinians in Israel and its occupied territories.

Although he refused to elaborate, Abu Sharif seemed to be indicating that as long as the PLO has a say in who represents Palestinians, the delegation does not necessarily have to include PLO members.

Baker places ME plan to Shamir: US Secretary of State James Baker presented proposals for Arab-Israeli peace talks to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on Sunday and told reporters Washington might issue invitations even if Israel did not agree, Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

"We've always indicated that would be something we might pursue. That doesn't mean we've decided to do it because we haven't Baker told reporters at a meeting with three Palestinian leaders before seeing Shamir.

"But at some point I think you have to consider it of course it would be much better, if there is going to be a conference, if every one could sign on before invitations are issued."

Fire kills 12 in Argentina: Fire swept through a long-distance bus in northern Argentina late on Saturday, killing 12 people and wounding 20 others, Argentine news agencies reported on Sunday, Reuter from Buenos Aires says.

The flames broke out in the rear-placed motor and quickly engulfed the bus as it travelled through Formosa province about 1,200 km (750 miles) north of Buenos Aires.

Gastro-enteritis kills 183 in Nepal: A further 183 people have died in western Nepal following an outbreak of gastro-enteritis and measles which has claimed around 600 lives in the past eight weeks, public health sources said Sunday, AFP from Kathmandu reports.

Officially, the fresh deaths in the districts of Achham and Dang, 360 kilometers (225 miles) west of Kathmandu, stood at 106 as of Saturday.

"Although officially only 83 deaths caused by gastro-enteritis and measles in more than 19 villages on the outskirts of Achham urban area were confirmed, at least 150 have died since Friday," local MP Govinda Shah said.

Parliament to run Nicaragua: Nicaragua's biggest party, the leftist Sandinista front, reformed its statutes Sunday to place power in the hands of an elected national assembly instead of a directorate, reports AP from Managua.

The change was voted by acclamation at a two-day national congress by more than 1,000 delegates from all over the country, the first such a meeting the Sandinista National Liberation Front has held since it was formed 11 years ago.

Effective immediately, the party's top organization will be the Sandinista Assembly, consisting of 120 members elected for a period of four years.

Tibet to be given more autonomy

HONG KONG, July 22: The Chinese government is to give Tibet a higher degree of autonomy with a series of special policies and flexible laws, a semi-official Chinese news agency reported here today, reports AFP.

The new legislation, autonomous regulations for the Tibet autonomous region, is currently being drafted by the Tibetan Peoples' Congress, the Hong Kong China News Service (HKCNS) quoted relevant departments as saying.

The agency said the new laws would implement and codify autonomous powers and special policies and flexible

measures that the central government bestowed to the region.

They would earnestly materialise and perfect the system of autonomous rule in Tibet, which was taken over by China in 1950, it said.

The draft legislation may be ready for deliberation and promulgation by the full session of the National People's Congress early next year, the report said.

HKCNS gave no details of the proposed new measures, which it said were originally put forward by the 10th Panchen Lama, who died of a heart attack on January 28 last year.

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Moscow keen to acquire technology

Gorbachev offers to sell Soviet defence hardware to West

NEW YORK, July 22: Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has offered to sell large shares of the Soviet Defence Industry to the West in exchange for access to western technology, the Newsweek reported, says Reuter.

Gorbachev made the offer at last week's Group of Seven (G-7) summit in London, the weekly news magazine said in its July 20 issue, excerpts of which were released on Sunday.

The plan, according to docu-

ments the Newsweek said it had obtained, would give the West access to some of the Soviet Union's most closely guarded military secrets.

In return, western nations would provide business expertise and capital to the Soviets and help them convert their defence plants to civilian use.

The Newsweek said Gorbachev wanted western companies to participate jointly with state-run industries in a 30 to 40 billion dollar plan to transform his coun-

try's defence facilities.

At the three-day summit, which ended last Wednesday, Gorbachev won a pledge from G-7 industrial states — the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Canada and Italy to provide trade and technical help.

Gorbachev's plan is sure to infuriate many Soviet military conservatives already unhappy with his reforms, the Newsweek said.

It is also likely to draw criticism from the West since

the plan does not mention Soviet defence cuts. Without these cuts, the joint ventures could in fact provide technology that could ultimately be used for weapons production.

The Newsweek said while eastern leaders studied Gorbachev's proposals, a team of Japanese experts flew to Moscow last week to figure out the best way to beat swords into profitable television sets, VCRs (Video Cassette Recorders) and automobiles.

AP adds: Mikhail Gorbachev's meeting with Western economic leaders affirms his stature as a statesman but will not end the political battle over economic reforms, politicians and economists said Saturday.

"It doesn't influence his position at all" in the economic debate, said Oleg Rumyantsev, a Social Democratic Party leader and radical Russian republic legislator. "Gorbachev already has an image as a man who can handle international affairs."

The reaction showed the hurdles Gorbachev still faces after meeting with leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized countries in London this week. The President won a coveted invitation to the meeting and G-7 promises of technical assistance and advice, but got no credits or investment.

"His game is political, and this (summit) was economic, and the two are not connected," said Tatyana Koryagina, a Soviet government economist.

Gorbachev went to outline a reform plan and ask for Western help to modernise key Soviet industries and make the ruble a convertible currency.

Aid was intended to smooth transition to a market economy for Soviet citizens who are increasingly finding it impossible to make ends meet.

Price increases that took effect in April pushed retail prices 90 per cent higher than they were last year. The government ordered wage increases to compensate, but they have lagged behind price rises.

The Soviet equivalent of gross national product dropped 10 per cent in the first half of 1991 from the same period last year. Soviet national income fell 12 per cent in the first six months of the year and industrial production dropped 6.2 per cent, the government announced while Gorbachev was in London.

Gorbachev, after returning Friday from London, called his trip the beginning of a long process of Soviet integration into the world economy.

"I think our people will receive this with satisfaction," Gorbachev said. "There are very complicated and responsible tasks in front of us all."

But economist Leonid Abalkin said in an interview published Saturday in the newspaper Arguments and Facts that even with Western aid, "the situation will worsen.... during the next year or year and a half."

"We will face substantial changes in the situation in five years if we take enormous," Abalkin said.

Gorbachev reached final agreement in London with US President Bush on a long-awaited nuclear weapons reduction treaty. That allowed the leaders to set July 30-31 as the date for a superpower summit in Moscow.

But Gorbachev will be hard-pressed to translate the diplomatic gains into the political battle over the economy between reformers and hard-liners.

The summit "will not make any difference in the political situation," Koryagina said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and other republic chiefs favour radical reforms proposed by economist Grigory Yavlinsky, while the Soviet government led by Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov supports more cautious steps.

"These circumstances force us to adopt not the best, not ideal reforms, but those that are capable of ensuring the consent and support of the main political forces," Abalkin told the newspaper.

"And it's necessary to find a compromise between them."

Gorbachev's big test will come Thursday when top Communist Party leaders meet in a plenary session of the policy-setting Central Committee. The session will consider a proposed pro-reform platform that is expected to irritate hard-liners and aggravate the possibility of a party split.

Gorbachev has said he supports the new platform.

Off the Record

Musical revives a wartime tale

TOKYO: As wartime idol Rikoran, actress Yoshiko Yamaguchi symbolized Japanese dreams of an Asia united under Tokyo. The tale of how her beauty and talent charmed a nation marching blindly toward defeat is being performed by a leading theater troupe to remind Japanese of their disastrous militarist past, reports AP.

"Rikoran — The Musical" is proving to be a catharsis for older Japanese still grappling with their own roles in their proud nation's defeat and recovery.

For younger Japanese, it's a powerful eye opener, a history lesson usually left out of textbooks, says producer and director Kelta Asari. Asari decided Japan's agonizing over whether to get involved in the Gulf War offered the right opportunity to retell Rikoran's story.

"It's time to correct our history, to make it clear just what happened."

Young Japanese have no idea of what happened just 50 years ago. How can they understand their own country's position now if they have no idea of what we went through earlier?" Asari said.

The musical has opened for a second run after a sell-out first run in January. In the decades before World War II, Japan colonized Korea, Taiwan and much of northern China seeking natural resources and military influence to match Western nations.



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A ticket to earthly comforts

BANGKOK: Thai women, seeking western husbands to provide them with a ticket to more comfortable lives, are signing up with international match-making agencies in increasing numbers, reports AFP.

Such agencies ply a lucrative trade here that cashes in on Thai women's dreams of marrying foreigners from economically advanced countries such as France, Britain, Germany and the United States.

According to a recent survey, five international match-making agencies have an average of 600 to 1000 applicants each a year.

Some agencies reported a dramatic increase in business during the past three years as women, who pay nothing to be listed, sign on for foreign husbands.

When putting together video catalogues, the agencies cater to western men's fantasies of Asian women as docile, submissive and sexy.

During the video-making session, one agency advised a female client to look sweet and sexy and to wear a skirt. Trousers are frowned upon as "unfeminine."

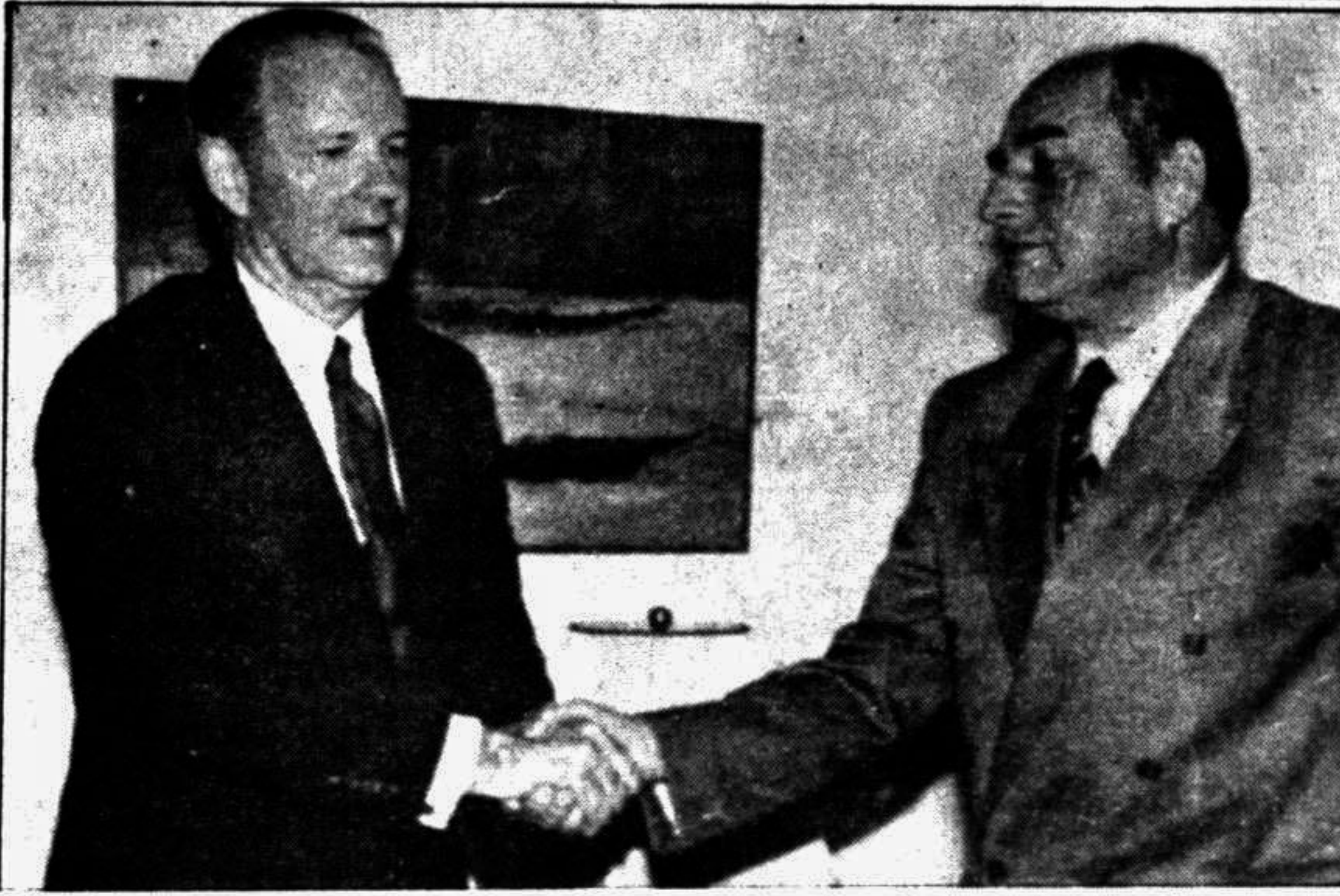
Sopa, 28-year-old bank clerk, is typical of the women who enlist. After seeing a western film, she said, she began to dream of marrying a farang, the Thai term for western whites.

2.65 lakh economic crimes in USSR last year

MOSCOW: More than 256,000 economic crimes were registered in the USSR last year. Grand embezzlement registered a 14.6 per cent, while corruption leaped by 9 per cent. Agrifusiness has ranked first on the list of crime-affected sectors of the Soviet economy, accounting for 40 per cent of all embezzlement cases, report IAN.

Pravda reports state-sector goods are bought up en masse to be resold at exorbitant prices. Underground shops are mushrooming. They use raw materials snatched away from the state sector by bribes. The shadow economy bribes its way to the tractors, timber, and farm produce, and to the banks which grant to underground business credits worth millions. More often than not these credits are not repaid. The trick is done by fake bankruptcies and bubble cooperatives. The investigation recently conducted into fifty such crimes alone revealed an economic damage worth about one billion roubles.

As the Soviet economy is emaciated by its chronic diseases, its "shadow" is thriving.



JERUSALEM: US Secretary of State James Baker shakes hands with the head of a Palestinian delegation, M Faycal Hussein at the US consulate here Sunday. Baker has now gained the support of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt for his peace-keeping efforts. —AFP photo

Gen Beg fears Indian attack

ISLAMABAD, July 22: Pakistan's chief of staff said he is concerned that India, unable to quell Muslim unrest in the border area of Jammu and Kashmir, might attack Pakistan, a military spokesman said Monday, reports AP.

"It is quite likely that in sheer desperation India could launch an adventure against Pakistan," Army chief-of-staff Gen Mirza Aslam Beg reportedly said in an address to soldiers during a weekend tour of eastern Punjab province, which borders India.

Beg is scheduled to retire next month.

India and Pakistan have twice gone to war over Kashmir, a former princely state divided between India and Pakistan after the subcontinent was partitioned in 1947.

"Events are fast changing in the region and the shadows of war have started appearing," Beg said in statement distributed by the state-owned Associated Press of Pakistan.

He did not elaborate. The Indian Embassy in Islamabad was not immediately available for comment.

India launched a military crackdown on Muslim secessionists demanding either independence or union with Pakistan. At least 2,500 people have been killed in the fighting.

India has accused Pakistan of arming and training the militants, who freely cross the ceasefire line separating the two countries.

Pakistan denies the charges, but supports the militants' right of self-determination.

The freedom struggle of the people of Kashmir is gaining momentum with every passing day and it is now impossible to suppress it," Beg said according to APP.

Beg also claimed that India would help from Israel.

"India would not be alone in its adventures against Pakistan. It would be aided by others who are frantically out to harm and destabilize Pakistan," Beg said.

Beg described the six Israeli tourists seized in June by Muslim militants in Indian-held Kashmir as "Israeli commandos." Five of the tourists escaped the militants and one of the Israelis was killed when he jumped a guard to help free the group.

An on-the-spot account

A horrifying night of death and rape in Kenya

NAIROBI, July 22: A horrifying night of death and rape at a mixed-sex school has forced Kenya to examine an education system which many experts say is plagued by indiscipline, mismanagement and corruption, reports Reuter.

President Daniel Arap Moi, himself a former teacher, was moved to tears last week when he visited St Kizito State-run mixed boarding school in central Kenya where the boys went on a Saturday night rampage on July 13.

Nineteen girl pupils died in a stampede to escape the boys.

The school had a total of 577 pupils aged between 14 and 18.

Of these, 306 were boys and 271 girls. Most pupils were the children of peasant farmers and small businessmen.

Moi appointed a committee to investigate student indiscipline and Education Minister Peter Aringo said it would examine the entire education system "to find the roots of indiscipline in schools."

A while Aringo blamed the disaster at St Kizito on drinking and drug-taking by the boys, many education experts said the real causes lay deeper.

With around 24 million people and a population growth rate of more than three per cent a year, one of the highest in the world, Kenya is hard-pressed to keep up with the demand for schooling.

Last year it spent 36 per cent of the state budget on schools and universities. But education experts say many schools are of poor quality, and

point especially to lax Management.

"Laxity and instability in administration has led to rapid growth in student indiscipline," said the official, who asked not to be named.

Most Kenyan children are educated at state run public schools which in some cases, like St Kizito, are partly funded by churches.

Up to one third of the public secondary schools are mixed boarding schools.

They are a far cry from the elite boarding schools with lavish rounds and comfortable sleeping quarters round in highly developed countries.

In Kenya, pupils sleep in cramped dormitories, scramble for food in overcrowded dining halls and have minimal recreational facilities. Discipline is often autocratic.

But economist Leonid Abalkin said in an interview published Saturday in the newspaper Arguments and Facts that even with Western aid, "the situation will worsen.... during the next year or year and a half."

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KARACHI: Government troops keep watch during a procession of Shiite Muslims in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, in an effort to avert any clashes with Muslims Sunday, as sectarian violence has been running high between both communities. —AFP photo

Y'slav army unit stages rebellion

LJUBLJANA (Yugoslavia), July 22: An airborne unit of the Yugoslav federal army staged a short-lived rebellion the day after the central government announced that federal forces were pulling out of the northern republic of Slovenia, Defence Ministry said.

The statement said the revolt had been led by Colonel Ljubomir Bajic, commander of the Fifth Air Corps, whose zone covers Slovenia.

Col Bajic had ordered his planes into the air fully armed to attack Slovenia and Croatian targets from Bihae airfield, the statement said.

"The action was stopped for unknown reasons when the planes were already in mid-air," the statement said.

Powerful blast rocks Kabul

KABUL, July 22: A powerful blast, attributed by a government spokesman to an outgoing rocket, rattled Kabul today as Muslims prepared to celebrate an annual religious festival in the Afghan capital, reports AFP.

The loud explosion occurred at 9.00 am (0430 GMT) in the Salanwat area, where the Afghan state television station is located.

Kabul TV stopped broadcasting after the blast, but it was not known if the interruption was linked to the explosion.

Diplomats said they saw soldiers on the streets near the TV tower, but could not give details.

A government spokesman said the noise was that of a medium-range surface to surface missile being launched from Kabul, but added that he did not know from which area it had been fired.

Three killed in Ireland

BELFAST, July 22: A man was shot dead by gunmen in predominantly Protestant East Belfast on Saturday, taking the Northern Ireland death toll to three in less than 24 hours, police said, reports AFP.

Saturday's killing occurred in a warehouse, they added. There were no details on the identity of the victim.

On Friday two men were shot and killed in separate sectarian attacks in the British-ruled province.

Two Indian army officers arrested for spying

NEW DELHI, July 22: Two retired Indian army officers have been arrested and charged with entering into a criminal conspiracy to sell defence documents to Pakistan, the United News of India (UNI) said today, reports AFP.

The agency quoted official source as identifying the two as Hasinuddin Khan and Mohammad Israr and said they had been arrested under the

official secrets act, but did not give their rank at retirement.

It said Mr Khan was caught while allegedly handing classified documents dealing with Indian army unit strength and logistics to a man employed by the Pakistan High Commission.

No date of arrest was given, but UNI said the two were charged before New Delhi's Chief Metropolitan Magistrate last week.