

BRIEFLY

Kyrgyzstan seeks int'l aid: The republic of Kyrgyzstan has made an urgent appeal for international assistance to its people affected by strong earthquakes. Xinhua reports from United Nations.

At a press conference yesterday, Djumakadyr Atabekov, ambassador of the republic to the UN, told reporters that his newly independent republic was severely hit by earthquakes which have caused great damage to its national economy that could be compared to the consequences of the 1988 earthquake in Armenia.

A major earthquake measuring more than eight degrees on the Richter scale, hit Kyrgyzstan on August 19, 1992. 54 people were reportedly killed or missing and over 100 people were injured.

Greek cargo ship sinks in Red Sea: A Greek cargo ship sank in the Red Sea, Egypt's navigation sources reported Monday, reports Xinhua from Cairo.

All the nine crew members of 'Grigorios Tsirikos' were rescued and brought to shore. The ship sank Sunday near Ras Shukair with 832 tons of plastic materials on board.

Bad weather was the cause of the accident. No further details were immediately available.

Cuba, Indonesia sign trade accord:

Cuba and Indonesia, leading members of the Non-Aligned Movement, signed a trade and economic co-operation agreement on Monday, the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina said, reports Reuters from Havana.

The accord was signed in Jakarta by Cuban Foreign Minister Ricardo Alarcon and his Indonesian counterpart Ali Alatas. Both were taking part in a foreign ministers' meeting prior to a summit of Non-Aligned leaders.

Prensa Latina gave no details of the agreement between the sugar-exporting, oil-importing Caribbean island and Indonesia, which is a leading oil producer and member of OPEC (Organisation of Oil Exporting Countries).

The accord opens the way to future bilateral cooperation, the agency said.

Clashes leave 30 dead in Angola:

At least 20 soldiers and 10 civilians have died in clashes between government and UNITA rebel forces in central Angola at the weekend, the Portuguese news agency Lusa reported Monday, says AFP from Lisbon.

In a despatch from Luanda, it said Sunday's clashes at Kuito in Bie province erupted when UNITA forces attacked the provincial government building. Ten government soldiers, 10 UNITA men and 10 other people die. Lusa said quoting official sources.

Sunday the campaign director of the ruling MPLA party, Kundi Payama, escaped with his life in an attack against a party vehicle which left one dead and six wounded.

It said the attack was carried out by UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) fighters.

Clinton gains in latest poll:

Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton gained strength in a national poll released Monday while President Bush slipped from his post-convention level, AP reports from Washington.

The latest ABC News-Washington Post poll shows Clinton with 55 per cent support to Bush's 36 per cent.

The two were nearly even following the Republican National Convention, Aug 17-20. Since a poll taken for the same organizations immediately after the convention, Clinton gained eight percentage points and Bush lost six.

Russia denies report on germ arms production

MOSCOW, Sept 1: Russian officials on Monday rejected US accusations that Russia may be continuing to develop germ weapons, reports AP.

"All this is absolute lies," and all work on biological weapons was stopped in 1975, the Defence Ministry's Directorate for Bacteriological, Radiation and Chemical Defence told the daily Izvestia.

The statement came in response to a Washington Post report saying the United States and Britain are worried the Russian government may not have fulfilled a six-month-old promise to shut down the Soviet Union's extensive programme making illicit germ weapons.

"Our objective is that Russia take concrete steps to demonstrate that the former Soviet offensive biological weapons programme has been terminated," the State Department said Monday, confirming that a diplomatic effort was underway to bring Russia into compliance with an international ban on germ warfare programmes.

Acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger raised the subject last week in London with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

Bhopal gas disaster

Compensation increased for families of dead

BHOPAL, Sept 1: The government has increased by more than 66 per cent the amount of compensation to relatives of people who died in the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster, an official said Tuesday, reports AP.

The families will now receive 100,000 rupees (3,330 dollar) to 500,000 rupees (16,665 dollar), said Babulal Gaur, the man in charge of distributing compensation to victims of the world's worst industrial calamity.

More than 4,000 people died and 20,000 were harmed when poisonous gas leaked from a pesticide factory run by Union Carbide India Ltd, a subsidiary of the Union Carbide Corp based in Danbury Conn.

The increased compensation followed protests by the state government of Madhya Pradesh, of which Bhopal is the capital, against a decision awarding more compensation to victims severely injured in the accident than to the families of those who died.

Last month, the federal government said it would give injured survivors a maximum of 400,000 rupees (13,333 dollar). The families of those who perished would receive at most 300,000 rupees (10,000 dollar).

The precise amount for each victim will be decided by a special "claims court," said Gaur.

194 AIDS cases in India

NEW DELHI, Sept 1: There are 194 full-blown cases of the fatal Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in India so far, according to the latest official figures available today, reports Xinhua.

Of the 153,000 persons screened for the AIDS-causing Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV) so far in the country, 8,309 were tested positive.

The number of AIDS patients and HIV-positives in India is the highest among the southern and southeastern Asian countries.

Among the 194 AIDS cases, there are 146 men and 48 foreigners.

Several govt officials taken hostage

Tajik protesters storm presidential palace

MOSCOW, Sept 1: Protesters stormed the presidential palace of Tajikistan's Rakhmon Nabiyev on Monday and took several senior government officials hostage, Russian news agencies said, reports Reuters.

Itar-Tass said hundreds of demonstrators forced their way into the palace, took control of the ground floor and took a number of prisoners including members of Nabiyev's staff and government employees.

It said the demonstrators were demanding Nabiyev's resignation and the release of an army general suspected of involvement in the assassination of a top judicial official in the former Soviet republic last week.

A second agency, Nega, said two deputy Prime Ministers, a military adviser to Nabiyev and an official in charge of cabinet business had been taken away by the angry crowd to an unknown location.

Demonstrators at the scene said they would be held until Nabiyev, whose whereabouts were not known, agreed to talks.

Nabiyev, a former communist party boss, won his way back to power in elections in Tajikistan last November.

In May, he survived a popular rebellion by inviting the Liberal and Islamic opposition to help form a broad government coalition. Since then, his freedom of political manoeuvre has been strictly limited.

Armed opposition groups

have recently stepped up resistance in the southern Kurgan-Tyube region of the central Asian state, and the assassination of the judicial official in the capital Dushanbe raised fears of a new wave of mass violence.

Tass said the demonstrators wanted the release of Army General Rakhim Nurulloboev, suspected of involvement in the assassination of chief prosecutor Nurullo Khuvaidulayev on August 24.

They said Nurulloboev was being held by the KGB security police in connection with the killing.

Tass said the protesters were also angry at Nabiyev's failure to put an end to bloodshed and unrest in the south of the country, where border

raids and weapons smuggling from neighbouring Afghanistan are rampant.

Tajikistan, a mainly Muslim state, is among the poorest and most backward of the 15 former Soviet republics which gained independence with the breakup of the union last year.

Earlier on Monday, Tass reported that Nabiyev had accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Akbar Mirzoyev, apparently in connection with the mounting crisis.

Officials say Nabiyev is considering inviting a Russian-led commonwealth peacekeeping force into troubled regions of Tajikistan, opposition leaders argue this could lead to an all-out civil war and fuel Islamic fundamentalism.

Chinese dissident leader arrested

BEIJING, Sept 1: Chinese dissident leader Shen Tong, who recently returned from exile in the United States, has been arrested in Beijing shortly before he was to meet reporters, academic Ross Terrill said today, reports Reuters.

Shen, 24, was taken from his mother's home in Beijing at night on Monday, said Terrill, a member of advisory board of the US based Democracy for China and fund headed by Shen.

Shen, a leader in the 1989 pro democracy movement crushed by China's military, had scheduled a news conference on Tuesday morning to discuss his return. Terrill said by telephone from his Beijing hotel room.

On Monday, Shen's group in newton, Massachusetts, said the dissident had conveyed word of his detention in a coded telephone conversation.



HANOI: Vietnamese film student Vi Thi Dong, 17, waves to wellwishers after being crowned Miss North Vietnam at the end of a three-evening beauty contest on Monday, hosted by a youth newspaper. She was selected from some 150 entrants and will compete along with seven other North Vietnamese girls against southern contenders during the final in Ho Chi Minh city.

Palestinians dismiss Israel's self-rule proposals

WASHINGTON, Sept 1: Palestinian Arabs on Monday dismissed Israel's self-proposals as unacceptable and said peace negotiations were at an impasse, reports AP.

"There is, in a sense, a deadlock, and we are trying to find ways to end the deadlock," said Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi.

Despite the gloomy appraisal, Israel and Palestinian negotiators gave no indication they would halt their talks, now in a second week at the State Department.

In fact, Israel showed inter-

est in a Palestinian proposal to establish a working group to assess human rights conditions on the West Bank and in Gaza.

"Unfortunately, we are a little bit frustrated," chief Israeli negotiator Elyakim Rubinstein said of the Palestinians' response. "We are not desperate, and we are sure that ways can be found to deal with this frustration."

Rubinstein said Israel had offered the Palestinians "a sea change, a major change from the existing situation" and that

negotiations should be focused on how to implement that change.

Meanwhile, Ms. Ashrawi made clear in a briefing for reporters that the Palestinians engaged in a sixth round of negotiations with Israel are taking their cues from the Palestine Liberation Organization.

She said three members of the Palestinian delegation had been sent to Tunis for high-level consultations with the PLO, which is headquartered in the Tunisian capital.

"Everything that we present

is approved by our leadership," she said. "As you know, high policy is made by the PLO."

The statement was significant because Israel has said in the past that it was willing to negotiate only with Palestinians who had no clear or close links to the PLO.

Last April, Margaret D. Tutwiler, then the US State Department spokeswoman, said the PLO was not part of the negotiations but that it was not relevant to the Bush administration with whom the Palestinians met.

Shevardnadze to run for parliament speaker

TBILISI (Georgia), Aug 31: Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze announced Monday he will run for the post of parliament speaker as an independent, ending weeks of infighting among parties seeking to ally themselves with him, reports AP.

The speaker's job will be the nation's highest elected post following October 11 elections.

Georgian leaders still have not decided whether the country needs the post of a president. The former president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was ousted in January after a short but bloody civil war.

The decision followed weeks of political infighting among Georgia's 46 parties.

Gaddafi calls for direct talks with US

TRIPOLI, Sept 1: Libyan leader Colonel Moamer Gaddafi on Monday called for direct talks between his country and the United States to try and resolve and international standoff over two Libyans suspected of involvement in the mid-air bombing of a Pan American Jumbo Jet over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in 1988, the resulting crash killed 270 people.

The proposal came in the course of a three-hour televised speech given by Gaddafi to mark the 23rd anniversary of his coming to power.

The Libyan leader, suggesting that the United States did not want a new confrontation with his country, said that direct talks between the two countries would very probably lead to a settlement.

He added that certain Arab countries with close ties to Washington, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco and

Tunisia, could facilitate contacts.

Courts in the United States and Britain have been trying to obtain the extradition of two Libyans suspected of involvement in the mid-air bombing of a Pan American Jumbo Jet over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in 1988, the resulting crash killed 270 people.

The United States and France, which also suspects the two men of involvement in another airline bombing, have obtained a UN Security Council resolution imposing trade sanctions against Libya over the issue.

In his speech, Gaddafi criticised the United Nations role, saying the world body had restricted itself to putting pressure on his country.

Blast kills 15 civilians in Lanka

COLOMBO, Sept 1: A bomb hidden in a box of fish exploded in a crowded market in eastern Sri Lanka Tuesday, killing at least 15 people, most of them Muslims, the military said, reports AP.

At least 50 people were wounded in the blast in the predominantly Muslim town of Naindamaridu in Batticaloa district, about 140 miles (225 kilometers) east of Colombo, officials said.

The explosion destroyed a bus parked nearby, said the officials at the military headquarters in Colombo who cannot be identified under briefing rules.

They blamed Tamil Tiger rebels who are fighting for an independent homeland in Sri Lanka for the explosion.

Storm claims 76 lives in China

BEIJING, Sept 1: An intense tropical storm in southeastern China has left 76 people dead and seven missing after causing landslides and destroying thousands of homes and farms, officials and news reports said today, reports AFP.

Some 110,000 people were evacuated Monday from their homes in coastal Zhejiang province, where transport and telecommunications links have been cut, the state news agency Xinhua said.

The death toll in Zhejiang rose to 72, a provincial disaster management official said by telephone, adding that the figure was preliminary and expected to rise as reports came in and rains continued to fall.

Forty-one people died in mudslides in Jingning and Huangyan counties, the official said. Four of the victims drowned when their ship overturned at sea Sunday.

Tropical storm Polly also hit Fujian, where four people died and seven were missing after rains pelted the province, a local official said by telephone.

The torrential rains, high tides and mudflows have flattened more than 5,000 houses and 100 kilometres (60 miles) of seawall, destroyed highways and damaged farmland, the Xinhua report said.

The storm has hit more than 50 countries and cities, affecting 7.5 million people and leaving nearly half a million stranded, it said. Worst-hit were southwestern and eastern coastal areas.

Large areas of Wenzhou, including its Longwan Economic Development Zone, had been flooded, while 40 kilometres (25 miles) of the city's seawall had been destroyed.

The storm travelled west across the South China Sea after hitting Taiwan with typhoon-strength gales.

Off the Record

Honeymoon package tour

SEOUL: One hundred couples who were married during last week's unification church mass wedding are on a six-day honeymoon package tour of North Korea, a church official said, Tuesday reports AFP.

The group plans to visit the birthplace of the church's founder, the Reverend Moon Sun-Myung, at the northwestern city of Chongju, as well as Pyongyang, Wonsan port and the Diamond Mountain tourist area.

The church spokesman said the couples were from 18 countries, including Britain, France, Germany, Japan and the United States, but that no South Koreans were on the tour.

Grant divorce or face jail

JERUSALEM: Jewish men who refuse to grant their wives divorces could soon face serious criminal charges, Israel television reported Monday, reports AP.

Uzi Baram, Acting Minister for Religious Affairs, made the promise while addressing a group of "agunot", or abandoned wives, demonstrating outside his ministry here Monday.

According to Jewish religious law, which governs marriages and divorce in Israel, agunot may not remarry until their husbands agree to divorce them. Any children they have out of wedlock are considered "mamzerim", or bastards, and their descendants are excommunicated for ten generations.

"I'm not for reviving the old system, where recalcitrant husbands were beaten until they shouted 'I give in'," Baram told the agency, referring to ancient method of persuasion. "But in modern times, there are effective ways of forcing a man to give a divorce," he said. "Like revoking his driver's license."

It sounds like bad movie plot

HARDWICK, Ga: It sounds like a bad movie plot. Women inmates claim rape, prostitution, coerced abortions, sex for favours, reports AP.

But this is not explosive fiction. It is sordid fact. At least 70 women have said they were abused by guards and other employees at the Georgian Women's Correctional Institution. Their attorney expects 30 more to tell their stories soon. Ten employees have been fired and criminal indictments are expected this fall.

The scandal in Hardwick, a fenced compound of sand-colored concrete buildings tucked in the woods 100 miles (160 kilometers) southeast of Atlanta "is the broadcast and the deepest scandal of this sort that anyone can find a record of," said Robert Cullen, Georgia Legal Services lawyer handling the case.

The prisoners are reluctant to discuss the charges with reporters. Details can be culled from six affidavits filed in US District Court in Macon.

"I had no way out of the relationship once it began. He was very demanding of me," said one woman who allegedly first had sex with her prison supervisor in a bathroom during a lunch break the day she was assigned to his work detail.

She said the year-long affair included oral sex, anal sex, sadomasochistic relations and fantasy role-playing. Another said the state paid for an abortion she didn't want after she was impregnated by her supervisor.

Virgin Mary to appear?

COLD SPRING, Ky: Thousands of faithful gathered Monday outside a small-town church hoping there was some truth to a prediction that the Virgin Mary would appear in this northern Kentucky town, reports AP.

Several hundreds people celebrated a daytime Mass at St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church, then many settled back in anticipation of nightfall.

Late Monday, 4,000 people were in the church parking lot and another 1,500 were inside the church, listening to a sermon that was piped outside. Some people brought lawn chairs or sleeping bags to sit on.

"Some people seeing a miracle, some are awaiting a miracle and some are here to pray," said Jim Benton, a volunteer working with the church.

The parish priest, the Rev. Leroy Smith, reported two months ago that he had been told by a mystic from Ohio that his church would receive a visit from the Virgin Mary at midnight August 31.

Serbian deputies demand Yugoslav PM's ouster

BELOGRADE, Sept 1: Serbian nationalist deputies in the federal parliament on Monday staged the strongest challenge to Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Panic, demanding a no-confidence vote against the government of the Serb-born American, reports AP.

Under the constitution, parliament must vote within three days on a no-confidence motion.

Panic, elected last month as prime minister of the new, smaller Yugoslavia comprising Serbia and Montenegro, has openly challenged the federation's most powerful politician — Serbia's hard-line President Slobodan Milosevic.

Milosevic's Socialists and their nationalist allies who

dominate the federal assembly demanded Panic's resignation for overstepping his authority at last week's Yugoslav peace conference in London, the Belgrade-based news agency Tanjug said.

Panic proposed a 12-point peace plan in London. It included the recognition of all former Yugoslav republics within their original borders, and the opening of talks with leaders of the ethnic Albanian majority in Serbia's restive Kosovo province.

The demands for Panic's resignation could jeopardize the conclusions of the London conference, as several points of his plan were included in the conference's final documents.

The results apparently have angered Milosevic, who has publicly clashed with Panic over the peace plan. His anger was echoed Monday by Socialist deputies.

"Yugoslavia is not Panic's (California) plantation or ownership," Socialist deputy Brana Crncevic told parliament.

"We are facing a great adventure if we vote 'yes' for him. Yugoslavia cannot be represented by someone who is so irresponsible," Crncevic said.

But in a recent interview with The Associated Press, Panic said he would not be pushed aside lightly by Milosevic.

"The fight could be between two equals. And I'm willing to

fight," he said.

The Serbian president and his nationalist allies vehemently oppose Panic's proposal to recognize the borders of all Yugoslav republics from before the outbreak of war last summer.

That would effectively sever links between the new Yugoslavia and territories seized by Serbian forces in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Milosevic also rejects talks with Kosovo Albanians on restoring autonomy to the province brought under direct Belgrade rule two years ago, although Serbs make up only about 10 per cent of its population.

In London, Panic warned Milosevic to respect the confederal conclusions or resign. The American businessman, whose outspoken approach to politics has won him friends and foes in Serbia, interrupted Milosevic and contested his right to speak for Yugoslavia.

But the Serbian leader is still considered Yugoslavia's most powerful politician. His Socialists, the former Communists, have 94 seats in the 178-seat federal parliament. The Serbian Radical Party, headed by Milosevic's ultra-nationalist ally Vojislav Seselj, has additional 30 seats.

Monday's motion was proposed by 38 Socialist deputies

and 30 Radicals.

Montenegro's Party of Socialists announced they would back Panic, raising the possibility of a split between Serbia and Montenegro.

Serbian opposition parties, who seem increasingly willing to give Panic a chance to govern, boycotted May elections for parliament and thus are not represented in parliament.

The largest opposition party — the Serbian Renewal Movement — in a statement criticised Monday's no-confidence motion.

By demanding Panic's resignation, "Milosevic wants to stay in power," the statement said. "But Serbia will hang by the noose."

Thai villagers raze police station

BANGKOK, Sept 1: Around 2,000 angry villagers Monday night razed a police station, two living quarters and three vehicles in Chiang Mai after police failed to take suitable action against three officers who, the villagers allege, raped and killed a villager resident, reports Xinhua.

The incident followed the controversial death of Miss Chantira Sukcharoen, 32, whose body was found in a police guard booth at Ban Huay Rai in Tambon Mae Faek Mai, Samsai district in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, on the night of August 22, the Bangkok Post reported today.